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Lesbian Out-Look on High School Experiences:

A Case Study-Narrative Inquiry

by

Leanne Michelle Tsutsumi

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Lesbian Out-Look on High School Experiences: A Case Study-Narrative Inquiry in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

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Dedication

To my Grandparents Phyllis & Clifford Lindell
and Mieko & Hiroshi Tsutsumi.
I wish you could be here to experience this with me,
and to Pearl S. Landsman I am honoured and thankful that you
came into my life and shared so much with me....

and

To my soul-mate, partner-in-life, and best friend, K. Mc. A.
You've reminded me of my strength in hard times and
never stopped listening, loving, and encouraging. Thank you.

Abstract

Lesbian Out-Look on High School Experiences: A Case Study-Narrative Inquiry

An interdisciplinary approach that included psychology, sociology, and cultural studies was utilized to provide a context in which high school experiences of a lesbian student could be explored. Heteronormativity, or the belief that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual is prevalent in North American society. This belief has been perpetuated both institutionally and culturally: in school, family, and peer settings as well as in the broader community and society. School and peer settings will be the focus of this case study-narrative inquiry. Interviews were conducted with one participant to explore: (a) Her experiences of high school as an 'out' lesbian, (b) who or what contributed to a safe place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirit, and queer/questioning (LGBTT-SQ) students in her school, and (c) recommendations she had for creating a safe(r) space in schools for LGBTT-SQ students. In addition, the context, process, and personal learning of the researcher was examined.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Focus of Study

It is not enough to merely state that all
human beings must enjoy equal dignity.
This must be translated into action.
- His Holiness the Dalai Lama -

Personal Background of the Researcher

My perceptions of this research project and the path that it has taken me on have changed, meandered, and shifted since I began two years ago. I initially became interested in doing research with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, two-spirit, and questioning (LGBTT-SQ) high school students after reading several articles reporting the significantly higher rates of suicide, substance use, and homelessness than seen in non-LGBTT-SQ youth. The shock, anger, and stirring within me to work toward change was fuelled by this new-found awareness of a group of people who had previously been invisible to me. Part of this new awareness impacted my personal life as I began to explore my own memories of high school and wonder about the kinds of experiences my lesbian, gay, bisexual, and two-spirit friends had in school.

While reflecting on my own experiences, memories of harassment, ostracism, and marginalization resurfaced. My group of girlfriends were harassed because we did not act like "real" girls should…because we did not fit into gender role norms on several levels. We dressed like boys/androgynously, did not wear make-up, listened to "strange" music, and had "weird" hair. Because of this, certain groups (mostly boys), saw it necessary to try and make us "normal" by throwing food and rocks at us, shoving us in the hallway, and calling us "dykes." No one in our group was out at that time and yet the message was clear. To be different and lesbian was unacceptable and wrong.

As I further explored my memories of high school, the extent of the invisibility of LGBTT-SQ students was pervasive. I cannot recall one person who came out in high school, and only learned of people coming out once high school was over. This blindness to, and passive acceptance of, the invisibility of LGBTT-SQ students was largely due to the position of "straight privilege" that I live(d) in.

Peggy McIntosh (1989) discusses "white privilege" as an entity that white people are taught not to recognize. She distinguishes between privilege as earned strength and systemically produced groups that possess unearned power (e.g., white people, straight people, able people, young people, and so on). Critically, white people are taught (implicitly) to see, and think about, their lives as morally neutral, normative, average, and ideal. In terms of white privilege, when working with people from different, or "other," racial/ethnic backgrounds, the aim is to allow "them" to be more like "us" (McIntosh).

I believe that similar premises are present within the realm of sexual identity. Just as white people are taught not to recognize white privilege, straight people are also taught not to recognize straight privilege. Straight privilege goes even further in that anything other than straight is assumed to not even exist. Heteronormativity is a term coined by Warner (1993, as cited in Britzman, 1997) representing a belief that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual (Friend, 1993). It has also been defined as "the widespread belief that heterosexuality is normal and that everything that is not heterosexual is somehow aberrant" (Tierney, 1997, p. 39).

This links with straight privilege in that heteronormativity places heterosexuality as culturally accepted and acceptable, morally neutral, normative, average, and ideal. Nakayama (1998) furthers this by acknowledging "the myriad ways that

heteronormativity is embedded in social structures and the seemingly infinite modes of communicating heterosexual superiority" (p. 112). In essence, heteronormativity is present in more arenas than anti-gay epithets or silencing of LGBTT-SQ experiences, relationships, and communities. According to Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere Canada (EGALE, 2001) unequal treatment remains in areas such as age of consent laws, exclusion of queer persons from hate crimes legislation, and the "homosexual panic" defence, which enables murderers of queer persons to seek reduced sentences if their same-sex victim "came on" to them. Also present in Alberta are continued efforts to broaden concepts of marriage to include same-sex couples. This has been necessary since the provincial government invoked the constitutional 'notwithstanding' clause to preserve Bill 202, which restricts marriage to opposite-sex couples (EGALE, 2002). Layers of heteronormativity are "not simply embedded within individual identities but rather organize the entire social order" (Nakayama, 1998, p. 120). Heteronormativity is linked more to a cognitive or belief system, whereas homophobia is often seen as operating out of emotional fear, hatred, ignorance, and anger (Nakayama, 1998).

Looking at how straight privilege can be experienced in a heteronormative culture (as adapted from similar points made by McIntosh, 1989) I, as a straight woman will: see people of my sexual orientation widely represented (in fact, everyone is assumed to be straight); learn about people of my sexual orientation who made my country/heritage what it is; be sure that my children (if I have any) will be given curricular materials in school that testify to the existence of their sexual orientation; be sure that if I need legal, mental health, or medical help, my sexual orientation will not effect the services I

receive; travel with my partner without expecting embarrassment or hostility in people who interact with us; and I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life; institutional and social.

Critically, McIntosh (1989) emphasizes the political nature of privilege. Specifically, she states that, "the silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here" (p.12). Privilege is further discussed in relation to meritocracy, the "myth that democratic choice is equally available to all" (p. 12). By keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action exists only for a few people, a certain power structure is maintained. Not only do the few with the freedom of confident action elevate their power (through keeping the awareness of privilege clouded and elusive), power is kept within the same groups that have most of it already (McIntosh).

Thus, with a brief discussion of straight privilege in mind, it is important to look at the role it plays in my research. I believe that straight privilege has impacted the way I view the world, and only until very recently, has clouded my vision. I can also recognize that the process of making elements of my straight privilege visible, while continuing to address such elements, will be an ongoing process. I also realize that this may contribute to imbalance in my research because of an implicit power imbalance in the interview/research relationship with Jen. How this evolved and was addressed within the research relationship is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Cultural Politics

Furthering McIntosh's (1989) discussion of privilege as a political tool is Tierney's (1997) discourse on cultural politics. Critically, Tierney posits that culture and politics, as we know them today, cannot be divorced from the other. "Culture is a process

of production, circulation, and consumption rather than an object to be studied and inherited" (p. 22). In other words, culture is not static, nor is it as easily/conveniently segmented and boxed off as our society portrays it to be (e.g., clothing, ceremonies, music, and so on). Culture, then, is a creation both dynamic and ever-shifting to be interpreted (Tierney). Spindler and Spindler (1987) discuss culture as an ongoing dialogue that is first learned in childhood, however, learning continues as circumstances change. Culture is seen as a social construct involving action and interaction. Furthermore, cultural dialogue is expressed in behaviour, words, symbols and in the application of cultural knowledge to make social situations 'work' for oneself. For example, a LGBTT-SQ youth may 'pass' as heterosexual in order to protect him/herself from harassment, thereby using his/her cultural knowledge to negotiate safety within a heteronormative society. In essence, every act occurs within a context of social, historical, and economic situations (Tierney). Cultural politics is further identified as seeking "to accentuate difference and understand the invisible norms at work that account for our thinking of one group as mainstream and another as odd" (Tierney, p. 23).

One element of cultural politics is queer studies/theory, which Tierney (1997) summarizes as follows: "It is historicist in that it seeks to understand sexual identity over time, it seeks to uncover norms and decode ideological practices, it is confrontational and disruptive rather than consensual, it understands sexual identity in terms more significant than simply a sexual act, and it sees all of culture as interpretive and political" (p. 35). Sumara and Davis (1998) discuss queer theory as one approach to understand the multiple ways in which "desire is culturally produced, experienced, and expressed" (p. 198). Queer theory also examines how differences are given meaning and how these

assigned meanings establish and/or maintain the dominant culture (Carlson, 1998; Lipkin, 1999). Sedgwick (1990) posits that regulatory mechanisms exist within the dominant culture that work within rigid boundaries to police difference. Garber (2001) points out how queer theory "both affirms 'outness' and questions who can afford to be 'out' in a sexist, racist, classist society" (p. 191). Queer, in this thesis, is a fluid term to represent LGBTT-SQ persons who have been marginalized in society based on sexual identity.

Queer studies provides a way to examine issues such as what it means that two women kissing can cause a furor when presented on television even though heterosexual affection is portrayed frequently. It also takes up how perceptions of homophobia differ between groups. For example, Tierney (1997) describes liberal heterosexuals as seeing homophobia as isolated, individual acts, whereas it would be seen through the lens of queer theory/cultural studies as the "product of a system of structural power where heterosexuality is encoded throughout daily life" (p. 35). When examining roles of queer theory and cultural studies, it is equally important to explore their connection with critical postmodernism.

Critical postmodernism draws from cultural studies in that the point is "not merely to study the world but to change it" (Tierney, 1997, p. 24). In summary, a cultural politics of resistance is political because it challenges and questions the norm, thereby transgressing the existing power structure as well as working to alter constructs of cultural capital. More specific to queer studies is the aim to transform the ways in which the cultural world is experienced by all of us; to change how we communicate and interact with each other (Tierney). An element rooted in cultural politics is language; particularly what language is used, in what context, and by whom.

Language

Verbal discourse, or construction, is a central concept of cultural studies and cultural politics. How language is utilized holds immense power: "Every slur, every stereotype...is no more than war without weapons....[Language] is not a power to be underestimated" (Green as cited in Shewchuk, 2001, on-line). Verbal discourse occurs through media or interpersonal communication and places people in certain positions within a society. Part of this positioning process is the creation of an 'other' group that is perceived to be different from one's own in some way (Baldwin, 1998). Solomon (1986) asked if it is "possible for individuals, or groups, to define themselves without first creating an external Other?" (p. 73). He also advocated that language be seen within its historical and cultural limits. Terms used in language create ideologies positioned in different discourses (Baldwin). Such terms in the context of heteronormativity could include: wife, husband, marriage, reproduction, spousal benefits, family, and so on.

Cultural and interpersonal communication produces and reproduces ideology so that it permeates everything unless we bring our attention to it (Baldwin, 1998). In relation to straight privilege, many people are not even aware of its presence in North American culture. Without awareness, changing the ideology becomes increasingly difficult. However, language and ideologies can be challenged with new messages and texts being created to redefine terms in less oppressive ways.

A contested space within queer theory exists in the very use, or non-use, of the word 'queer.' To preface this discussion, Tierney (1997) emphasizes that 'queer' is a word like any other word. The extent to which it is inclusive or exclusive depends on the

meaning that society places on it. Tierney further suggests that readers should not accept an author's words without some degree of self-reflection.

Oppositional languages (including those used within cultural and queer studies) challenge values and ideologies that serve to further certain knowledge and power relations. New, or oppositional, languages move the users into a space of new ideas, questions, and ways of knowing or understanding the world (Giroux, 1993). Giroux highlights that some languages become ineffective over time in addressing problems or issues, thereby necessitating new languages. More specifically, "oppositional paradigms provide new languages through which it becomes possible to deconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated in traditional forms of discourse" (p. 167).

With this view of changing, shifting language, it is helpful to review the language that has been used to discuss sexual orientation issues. Prior to the 1970s, the term "homosexuality" was either absent from use or was used in a way to define the topic as deviant, dangerous, and pathological (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; Tierney, 1997). The 1970s witnessed the discussion of "gay and lesbian" people as "normal or almost normal" (Tierney, p. 27). To put this in context, it was in 1973 that homosexuality was removed as a mental illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual compiled by the American Psychiatric Association. Whereas homosexuality took a medical, scientific, and pathologizing connotation, "gay and lesbian" took on the identity of a minority group in need of rights and understanding.

Since the early 1990s, 'queer' has been used in academic fields such as English, sociology, education/critical pedagogy, and more recently, psychology. Tierney (1997)

presents reasons for and against using the term queer. Reasons why queer is not used include: using gay and lesbian is likely more preferred, in part because the word queer turns people off (gay or straight), and the term queer is so inclusive of sexual orientation that it does not take into account issues such as race and class.

Several arguments have been put forward in support of using the term queer. Some use it because of its "embattled nature, its indeterminancy, and the manner in which it has been appropriated" (Tierney, 1997, p. 28). It is also used to portray a range of "nonstraight expression in, or in response to, mass culture" (p. 28). Queer can also be used to illustrate that sexual identity is more than being *either* gay *or* straight. Queer can provide a space in which sexual identities outside of the gay/straight binary can be included in the sex/gender/desire dialogue. Sexual identities that have been neglected include: transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, and questioning persons. Gender construction (e.g., what it means emotionally, psychologically, and representationally to be a girl/woman or boy/man) then becomes a nebulous concept that constantly undergoes transformation (Grace & Hill, in review; Tierney, 1997).

Grace and Hill (in review) discuss how queer can be expanded beyond differences in sex/gender/desire to look at how these constructs intersect with race, class, and culture/language/power. Also important is the social, historical, and political context in which queer is currently being used. The term is being reclaimed and reappropriated by those who were targets of the pejorative and denunciative term (Grace & Hill; Tierney, 1997). What was once a stigmatized term is now used as a "badge of solidarity" by some (Tierney, p. 29).

What/who has been included in the umbrella term queer has shifted and altered to offer a more encompassing representation of the queer community. While exploring how race, class, or age may be intertwined with sexual identity, queer also symbolizes that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirit, and questioning persons have "different histories, identities, needs, and desires that not only set them apart form heterosexuals but also from one another. The social thread that connects [queer] is marginalization" (Grace & Hill, in review, p. 1). While recognizing the complex and ever-changing nature of what queer means, Grace and Hill also acknowledge that making a cultural and political space for queer diversity means building some degree of community that recognizes and accommodates a variety of sex/gender and relational differences.

Tierney (1997) and Grace and Hill (in review) further discuss queer as a fluid term that can excite and encourage a response, while being encompassing enough to be inclusive of multiple meanings and multiple persons. Queer is also acknowledged as a "harsh term to name a historically harsh existence. It is a term that offers possibilities to transgress and transcend heteronormalized ways of naming and defining found in everyday conversations, government policy statements, academic discourses, and a host of other heterosexualizing productions and exchanges" (Grace and Hill, p. 19).

Tierney (1997) highlights that there are individuals who have the right to use the word queer and others who do not. To use queer in a confrontational manner, or to name and define someone (or a group) so as to marginalize or rob them of a voice is inappropriate, needless to say. The need to be constantly aware of the contextualized nature of all language is also emphasized by Tierney. He further concludes that "as long as speakers use queer in a socially and theoretically conscious manner, [he] supports

them" (p. 31). Also related to context is striking a balance between a need to confront, and other factors such as the situation and the intended audience.

As my learning and awareness of cultural politics, queer theory, and the power of language has broadened and developed, I have also struggled with the language I will use in this thesis. Part of this struggle is personal (e.g., being straight, do I have a right to use the term queer?; some of my lesbian and gay friends find the term queer offensive), part of it is contextual (e.g., some academic staff believe the term queer is inappropriate), and part of it is wanting to best meet the goals of my research (e.g., respecting the stories and context within which Jen lives).

I still remain torn, even as I write this. On one side, I wonder how my actions in using queer play into issues of power and politics, especially since I'm coming from a position of straight privilege. I also hear my lesbian and gay friends, and lesbian and straight colleagues, saying "I, personally, don't like that word," or "I think it's okay to use it as long as…," or "It's offensive. Don't use it." How do I come to a decision with these arguments swimming in my head? Another strong component in my process is acknowledging the academic context in which I am working. Language is a powerful tool, and it can have an impact more in one setting than in another. From this perspective, using LGBTT-SQ may be more appropriate within my current academic context.

However, on the other side, I feel that I should use queer because it challenges and questions heteronormative ideologies…because it excites and encourages response. When I use the term queer, I notice non-verbal cues in the other person, indicating that some kind of reaction has occurred at hearing it. In these situations, I then engage in a dialogue about what queer can mean, how it has been reclaimed, and how language has shifted

over time in terms of discussing sexual identity and queer persons. Most importantly, I believe that using queer in this thesis would respect my participant's own use of language and how she uses it to describe her identity and community. For this reason, I will use queer and LGBTT-SQ interchangeably in this thesis.

Research Question

Rights, health, and well-being of LGBTT-SQ youth have been the topic of an increasing amount of literature (Bagley & Tremblay, 2000; D'Augelli, 1998; DiPlacido, 1998; McFarland & Dupuis, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1994), especially over the past decade as it relates to the school environment (Friend, 1993; Lipkin, 1999; Malinsky, 1997; Quinlivan, 1996; Unks, 1995). Much of the research in the early- to mid- 1990s focused on negative events correlated with LGBTT-SQ identification (e.g., suicide rates, substance use, prostitution, homelessness, and dropping out of school (Ryan & Futterman, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994). Also, most of the research with LGBTT-SQ youth focused on gay and bisexual male experiences while neglecting to look at issues and experiences of lesbian youth. Lesbian youth are particularly vulnerable to invisibility since they are frequently not acknowledged during their adolescence and are perceived to suddenly appear in adulthood (Black & Underwood, 1998).

I felt that it was important to take a more strength-oriented, in-depth look at how school is experienced by lesbian youth. In doing this research, I wanted to examine the experiences of a lesbian youth through the exploration of high school environments, environmental stressors in school (if any have been experienced) and coping strategies, how a safe environment is being created in schools (e.g., who is involved in creating this safe place and inversely, who is contributing to an unsafe environment?), and what needs

to be done to foster a safe(r) environment from a lesbian student's perspective. More specifically, my research question is: How does a school environment impact a lesbian student's experiences of high school?

Purpose and Significance of the Question

The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences and reality of one lesbian youth who recently graduated from high school. By doing this research, I hope to examine how the participant's experiences relate to my own (both personal and professional) and to translate this process into action (e.g., conducting workshops, seminars, and/or discussions to provide background information and strategies to create change within a school environment so that it can be safe for *every* student).

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

In order to provide an overall context for this study, several issues need to be examined. To gain an understanding of discrimination and harassment in schools, it is necessary to look at how prejudice and discrimination are experienced in the larger society, particularly Western society. This is important since much of what is experienced in the larger society trickles down into settings such as families, schools, and communities. Gaining an awareness of theories of adolescent development will also be helpful in having a more holistic understanding of the experiences of queer youth in schools. More specifically, the emphasis of some developmental theories on family and peer support in an adolescent's maturation and identity development is likely quite different for LGBTT-SQ youth. Ways in which societal and developmental influences are present in school environments will also be discussed. Elements of school environments that are pertinent include: historical invisibility of queer students, role models, and inclusive curricula; peers and school counsellors; the impact that systemic exclusion has on queer youth (e.g., depression, low self-esteem, high drop out rate, and so on); and coping/resilience strategies utilized by queer youth/students.

Prejudice and Discrimination in Society

The term, "Multiculturalism" is a mainstay in Canadian language and identity, especially since the Multicultural Act was passed into law as Bill C-93 in 1988 (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1990). The Multicultural Act acknowledged the value of cultural pluralism to Canadian identity and promoted gaining an understanding of people from all cultures. However, what does this mean in people's

real-world experiences? What cultures are included in, or excluded from, our "mosaic?" Although the Multicultural Act aspired to ensure that every citizen (regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious background) could participate as a member of society with concomitant rights, privileges, and equalities, one culture was neglected—that of LGBTT-SQ persons.

At the same time, it is likely within Western culture that the Multicultural Act is automatically assumed to relate to visible minorities and racial/ethnic identifiers such as skin colour, clothing, and so on. With the recent events of September 11, incidents of racially-oriented hate crimes appear to have increased (Fitterman, 2001; Hagan, 2001; Johnsrude, 2002; Mitchell, 2001; Reid & van Rassel, 2001) and the issue of race and/or visible difference has come to the forefront of our collective mind. Hecht (1998) states that "class, race/ethnic, religious, sexual preference, age, and other distinctions seem to have become even more polarized and negatively emotionalized" (p. 4) since diversity in population has become more visible to mainstream society. This information runs counter to what we would expect—that increased visibility of minority groups would decrease polarization and negative emotionality related to these 'differences.' At the same time, increased visibility allows prejudiced people's 'objects of hatred' to be more easily identified, thereby more easily targeted with harassment and/or violence.

Prejudice and discrimination are exhibited toward groups based on 'difference,' including race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, and ability level. Before going further into theories of prejudice, it is important to define key terms in this area. Hecht (1998) highlights that discrimination and stereotyping are sometimes used interchangeably with, or to replace the term, prejudice. Amalgamation of these terms is

reductionistic for some, so these constructs will be explored as separate and different from one another. Prejudice is often thought of as an attitude or belief involving affective and evaluative reactions to group differences (Hecht, 1998). Stereotypes are the "well-learned, widely shared, socially validated general beliefs or cognitions about disempowered groups that reinforce or justify prejudice and reduce ambiguity" (Hecht, p. 8). Stereotypes are often seen as "facts" by those who hold them, seem to be triggered automatically, and tend to be over-generalizations of groups (Baldwin, 1998; Hecht 1998). Neuberg (1994, as cited in Hecht, 1998) differentiates stereotypes from prejudice in that stereotypes provide mis-information about what a group is purportedly like, whereas prejudice involves feelings toward or about that group. When stereotypes and prejudice have overt behaviours attached to them, these behaviours are called discrimination. Specifically, discriminatory behaviours act to exclude, avoid, or distance oneself from another person/group (Hecht).

Interestingly, Devine (1989, as cited in Baldwin, 1998) finds that people are aware of the stereotypes they hold about certain groups (e.g., blacks, whites) and that those who monitor stereotypes can lessen their influence on evaluative reactions to others' behaviours. Alternately, those people who deny that they hold stereotypes are more likely to have those stereotypes later resurface to influence their perceptions and judgments compared to people whose stereotypes are more visible. Visibility creates a space where stereotypes can be interrogated and deconstructed.

Baldwin (1998) identifies four perspectives or groups of theories to discuss "intolerance." Since our culture tends to perceive concepts in dichotomies and either-or frameworks, it is necessary to clarify meanings associated with the term intolerance.

Naturally, when intolerance is discussed, the concept of tolerance is also raised at some level. The word tolerance, according to popular usage, implies that there is something that needs to be "put up with" and at best reflects a neutrality (Baldwin, 1998). Goldberg (1997, as cited in Hecht & Baldwin, 1998) argues that because tolerance is enacted out of a power position, demeans through condescension, and makes prejudice and discrimination acceptable, tolerance is actually a negative. This differs somewhat from the definition in Webster's dictionary (Neufeldt, 1990) in which tolerance means having respect for others' views, beliefs, practices, and so on. Similarly, Freire (1998) asserts that:

> On an initial level, tolerance may almost seem to be a favor, as if being tolerant were a courteous, thoughtful way of accepting, of *tolerating*, [sic] the not-quite-desired presence of one's opposite, a civilized way of permitting a coexistence that might seem repugnant. That, however, is hypocrisy, not tolerance. Hypocrisy is a defect; it is degradation....Tolerance requires respect, discipline, and ethics (p. 42).

According to Freire, then popular meanings attributed to tolerance are really acts of hypocrisy. Based on this discussion of the meanings of tolerance, it is important to keep in mind the context in which the word is used (e.g., in a 'popular'/contemporary way or in a respectful way).

To provide a framework for the theories of prejudice, central metaphors for prejudice have been identified by Hecht (1998), based on the variety of definitions that are presently available. These metaphors include prejudice as: (a) fear of difference or the unknown (difference as threat), (b) dislike of difference or the unknown (difference as

aversive), (c) competition with difference for scarce resources (difference as competition), and (d) hierarchical and structure (prejudice as hierarchy) (p. 3). Baldwin (1998) expands on these metaphors as he discusses theories of prejudice based on evolutionary, group-level and structural, individual-level, and message-based approaches.

Evolutionary Perspectives. The basis of the evolutionary perspective is that prejudice is innate and has biological bases. From a heredity viewpoint, a person's biological being or physiology (e.g., brain structures and genetics) influences his/her behaviour (e.g., prejudice or discrimination). Evolutionary theorists would posit that the inclination to fear, separate from, mistrust, or mistreat other groups is based on instincts common to all humans and to other animal species. For example, instincts will lead species to attempt to better adapt to their environments and preserve their groups (Baldwin, 1998). In other words, 'otherness' as perceived by a group is seen as a threat to that group's survival.

Van der Dennen (1987, as cited in Baldwin, 1998) places emphasis on a trait found in all animal species, fear, as a contributing factor to prejudice. This is discussed in terms of "fear of the stranger and what the stranger incorporates: the strange, the unknown, the out-of-control, the potential chaos, the potential evil, the potential impurity, contamination and pollution, the potential threat and danger" (van der Dennen, as cited in Baldwin, p. 28). These points have been evident in examples of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and prejudice based on religion, particularly in arguments about difference that centre on potential evil, contamination, and threat or danger.

Another element of the evolutionary perspective is the concept of belonging or self-social identity. Related to fear of difference or the unknown are studies, reviewed by

Ross (1991, as cited in Baldwin, 1998), that show people's consistent preference for in-group members with tendencies to exaggerate group differences and to be antagonistic toward other groups.

Group-Level and Structural Approaches. The group-level or structural approach focuses on power relations that hold prejudices (e.g., sexism, heteronormativity) in place. Opotow (1990, as cited in Baldwin, 1998) contributes to the structural approach by assessing "moral exclusion": a double standard that occurs when individuals or groups are seen as existing outside the boundary where values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. The emphasis of this concept rests on exclusionary acts, often beginning with the way language is utilized by different groups. For instance, Bar-Tal (1990, as cited in Baldwin, 1998) acknowledges that the way in which people exclude others varies. However, the key underlying process is fear that leads to delegitimization. Delegitimization means that a group, or groups, are placed "into extremely negative social categories that are excluded from the realm of acceptable norms and/or values" (Bar-Tal as cited in Baldwin, p. 38). Baldwin (1998) takes this one step further and identifies that as delegitimization is furthered, words and beliefs can lead to physical action such as beatings or war.

Individual-Level or Social-Psychological Theories. A cognitive approach to conceptualizing 'difference' is essential to understanding an individual-level theory of prejudice. Such an approach emphasizes the organization of knowledge about groups into higher-level cognitive structures such as schemata, scripts, and prototypes (Baldwin, 1998). Essentially, the cognitive approach posits that people categorize groups and individuals based on their pre-existing knowledge base (e.g., previous experiences with

group members, stereotypes, societal messages). Categorization has been seen as serving a purpose in daily functioning. For example, categorizing can help people react quickly to incoming stimuli (Allport, 1954, 1979 as cited in Baldwin, 1998). However, categorizing is not always based on logical reasoning and may be influenced by negative experiences. How we categorize (in-group/us vs. out-group/them) groups and how words are used to describe the different categorized groups shape the ways in which we see them (Baldwin). For instance, certain categorizations may evolve into over-generalizations that contribute to negative stereotypes of a group.

Message-Based Approach. According to Baldwin (1998), two major components of the message-based approach are critical theory and cultural studies. In its entirety, the message-based approach seeks to be holistic and non-reductionistic. In line with postmodern constructs (e.g., entities as fluid and mutable), critical theorists and cultural studies proponents conceptualize phenomena as changing, unstable, and contested. Another component, which will not be discussed in-depth here, is rhetorical or discourse studies. These studies look at what is allowed to be said or communicated by different groups, as well as inter-group communication and how certain groups express intolerance (e.g., posters, movies, literature, newspapers, music, and so on). In essence, verbal discourse/construction places people in certain positions within a society (e.g., "othering" forms the basis of moral exclusion and aids in the creation of difference, which is at the heart of prejudice) (Baldwin, 1998; Pinar, 1998; Tierney, 1997).

The emphasis of critical theory and cultural studies is on power relations and historical contextualization, although cultural studies branches off from critical theory largely over the issue of culture (e.g., popular culture). Critical theory is informed by

multi-disciplinary research and tends to view all social sciences as inherently political (Baldwin, 1998). Kellner (1989, as cited in Baldwin) argues that many versions of critical theory are "motivated by an interest in relating theory to politics and an interest in the emancipation of those who are oppressed and dominated" (p. 49). When exploring power in particular, the primary focus is to instigate social change at either an individual or a structural level. For example, social change can be realized by working to equalize power structures and/or empowering individuals to resist the messages and structures of a dominant society (Baldwin).

Ways in which power is explored include evaluating/deconstructing ideology and problematizing. "Cultural and interpersonal communication creates and passes on (produces and reproduces) ideology so that, unless it is brought to our awareness, it is difficult to escape" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 53). Similarly, ideology is not seen as language, but as preceding us; as being our environment (Baldwin). Context and understanding the situation in which certain terms are discussed becomes of utmost importance. In essence, terms that represent ideology (e.g., democracy, freedom) need to be evaluated in light of their context/position in cultural and interpersonal communication structures. Another method of deconstructing messages is problematizing, wherein concepts that have been accepted in past research as "unified" or "consistent" are dissected to show their inconsistencies and tensions (Baldwin).

In this thesis, theories that are well-suited to the issue being researched are group-level or structural and message-based approaches to prejudice. Critical theory and the concepts of moral exclusion and delegitimization are also particularly relevant in understanding queer issues and experiences. One concept important in these theories is

power relations, particularly in Western society, and how they have perpetuated prejudices toward groups that have been oppressed historically, such as LGBTT-SQ persons/communities (structural approach). Another important concept is the holistic and non-reductionistic approach to exploring information. One way of doing this is to examine the context (e.g., political, historical, social) in which events occurred (message-based approach and critical theory). Moral exclusion and deligitimization are integral in this research because of the intersection of the moral and the political in the realm of same-sex relationships. Ideas about sexuality in Western society often lead to moral statements about what forms of sexuality are right and good, as opposed to those that are wrong, bad, and immoral. Ways of defining sexuality (e.g., through biology, religion, politics, and economics) create boundaries and categories that define right vs. wrong based on reproduction and family life (Klages, 1997).

Theories and metaphors articulated by Baldwin (1998) and Hecht (1998) are particularly relevant when entering into a dialogue on the positionality of LGBTT-SQ persons in North American society. Language has often been, and remains, a powerful tool utilized by mainstream society to silence, stigmatize, pathologize, and/or degrade certain groups as a way of delegitimizing these groups. The discussion of queer persons, their achievements, communities, and relationships has been neglected and actively silenced in North American society, especially in schools (Friend, 1993). As well, the invisibility of queer in conversational language creates a challenging position for members of this group in that risk of verbal and/or physical consequences increases if they speak up about, discuss, and explore queer issues. Moral exclusion and language

have also been used to place LGBTT-SQ persons on the periphery through insults and verbal harassments such as students calling each other "faggot," "fairy," and "dyke."

The LGBTT-SQ community has increasingly gained visibility since the late 1960s (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988). In accordance with Hecht's (1998) statement regarding the increase in division between groups, one could delineate that members of the LGBTT-SQ community are at higher risk for experiencing acts of discrimination from members of the dominant/mainstream society. Critically, Hecht revealed that most American people are surprised to hear that gay men are now the number one target of hate crimes (Hamilton, 1994 as cited in Hecht). This seems to imply that there is a disparity between what people believe is happening and what is actually occurring. For example, if most people are surprised that gay men are the number one target of hate crimes, then they are also likely assuming that respect for difference is much higher than it actually is in our society.

In terms of societal perceptions of sexuality, and sexual identity in particular, Lipkin (1999) reported that the percentage of Americans who disapprove of homosexuality has ranged from 50-57% since 1982. Such societal beliefs and values related to sexual orientation are likely to trickle down into families, communities, peer interactions, and school environments. These beliefs and values create heteronormative messages that are learned by developing children and adolescents. Among American teenagers in a 1998 poll, 58% of boys and 47% of girls said homosexuality is always "wrong" (Lipkin, 1999).

Canadian polls on public opinion toward gay and lesbian persons conducted between 1977 and 1996 were reviewed by EGALE (1999). Findings indicated that the

vast majority of Canadians are opposed to discrimination based on sexual orientation and levels of support for queer civil rights are increasing (EGALE, 1999; Grace, 2001). In terms of perceptions of same-sex marriage, the Globe and Mail conducted a poll following a parliamentary vote in 1999 that upheld the definition of marriage as being a union between a man and a woman (McIlroy, 1999). The Angus Reid Group surveyed 1,500 Canadian adults and found that 53 percent of Canadians favour legal marriage for same-sex couples, 44 percent were opposed, and 3 percent said they did not know or were undecided. This provides somewhat of a different image of attitudes in Canada toward queer persons than American attitudes as reported by Lipkin. Canadians appear to be more supportive of queer issues, and same-sex marriage in particular, than Americans. Furthermore, support for same-sex marriage was strongest in Quebec (61% voted in favour of same-sex marriage), with younger Canadians (18 to 34 years old) being more comfortable with same-sex marriage than Canadians 55 years and older (McIlroy).

Reviews of these survey results (EGALE, 1999; McIlroy, 1999) provide some indication that queer citizens in Canada have made progress in achieving equal rights in areas such as employment, housing, military service, and access to same-sex partner benefits (Grace, 2001). While it is important to acknowledge this, it is also imperative to recognize that support for equal protection of same-sex relationships and queer family formations is growing slowly. In addition, anti-queer hate crimes remind us that "fear and ignorance continue to be powerful forces despite a Queer politics of visibility and resistance designed to confront these debilitating forces" (Grace, 2001, p. 101). For instance, in a 1995 report on anti-gay/lesbian violence in Toronto, approximately 83% of 368 respondents reported that they knew at least one person who had been verbally or

physically assaulted because they were (or were perceived to be) queer. Anti-queer hate crimes included verbal assaults, physical threats, being chased or followed, hit by objects, spit at, punched, beaten or assaulted with a weapon. Furthermore, approximately one in five reported that police officers had harassed them (EGALE, 1999; Grace, 2001).

Adolescent Development

Bloch (1995) differentiates his theory of adolescent development from most existing developmental theories that use stage categorizations. Essentially, Bloch (1995) views psychological development through adolescence as evolving and dynamic, rather than occurring in discrete stages. Three basic issues form the basis of Bloch's theory: (a) adolescents' internal strivings to complete their development, (b) their need for parental sponsorship of those strivings, and (c) a wish to retain a positive relationship with their parents.

An essential component of adolescent development is the exploration and formation of identity. Mitchell (1992) identifies change, transition, modification, and re-arrangement as defining features of adolescence. Related to this is a critical task of constructing an identity that is solid enough to cope with demands of the adult world while satisfying personal needs, desires, and ambitions within the present adolescent world. Identity formation involves the integration of both positive and negative elements of the self. "Healthy identity," according to Mitchell (1992) is an ongoing process that modifies and adjusts to new experiences, new demands, and new responsibilities.

Basic themes of identity formation have been succinctly described by Hewitt (1989):

> It is to be a whole and complete person, and not fragmented into roles and ruled by scripts. It is to be connected with others and yet true to oneself. It is to participate in a variegated and often fragmented social life and yet to maintain continuity and integrity. Persons with identity, we are apt to say, know who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going (p. 152).

Two challenges in the ongoing process of identity development are attaining consistency (or continuity of identity) and individuality. Continuity of identity is the sense that one's self is unified and is expressed in consistent and predictable behaviour. At the same time, the process in which one becomes different from others, or differentiation, is activated (Mitchell, 1992). Differentiation is further complicated by needing to experiment with individuality, yet fearing the exposure of any aspect of oneself that may be uninviting, unattractive, or rejected by peers (Mitchell, 1992).

Interestingly, adolescence is a period in life between "the juvenile incompetencies of childhood and the full responsibilities of adulthood" (Mitchell, 1992, p. 124); a time of "psychosocial moratorium" according to Erikson (1968, 1974). This moratorium is a time of sanctioned and protected experimentation. In fact, experimentation is essential during this time frame, and is even expected to occur in relation to social roles, interpersonal relationships, political ideologies, and with the self and its perplexities (Mitchell, 1992). Further points to be aware of in relation to genuine identity are the need to test out and put into action one's identity and to have "direction" or focus to one's action (Mitchell, 1992).

Perceptions of the future become especially relevant during adolescence. This is due, in part, to increased mental abilities, or formal thought, and cultural demands of youth to plan and prepare for their future (e.g., career choices, education, and relationships) (Mitchell, 1992). One proposition regarding the significance of the future for adolescents is that the more optimistic adolescents are in picturing the future, the greater their ability to cope with adversity in the present. Alternately, the more negatively the future is viewed, the more overpowering is present pain. A second proposition about the future is that when the future is filled with promise, or high expectation, the tension of daily living loses much of its power. Conversely, when the future holds no promise, present pain consumes one's awareness (Mitchell, 1992).

Mitchell (1992) summarizes what he sees as key ingredients to a healthy adolescent identity: (a) A sense of "Who I am," and recognition of strengths and weaknesses of one's individuality, (b) a fairly solid sense of family and community, (c) a stable set of beliefs that guide important choices and decisions along with values that aid in moving into the future, and (d) a belief in one's ability to cope with life adversity as it presents itself (p. 136). As a counterpart to ingredients for healthy identity, it is important to explore the meaning of identity confusion. Identity confusion will likely occur, to a certain degree, in every identity formation. It is the experience one feels when the search for identity is frustrated. Feelings of self-doubt, role diffusion, and role confusion may occur. A preoccupation with the opinions of others, no longer caring about what others think, combined with withdrawal and drug or alcohol use to relieve anxiety may also be present during identity confusion (Mitchell, 1992).

Considerations in LGBTT-SQ Identity Formation. "For the most part, lesbian and gay adolescents are indistinguishable from their heterosexual peers—in fact, most are invisible" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 7). With this in mind, it is important to consider that although LGBTT-SQ youth experience a process of identity formation/exploration just as all adolescents do, there are certain unique factors involved. Prior to identifying these factors, it is important to frame the previously mentioned theories of adolescent development in terms of LGBTT-SQ youth experiences.

For instance, two to Bloch's (1995) three basic issues in adolescent development involve parental sponsorship and maintaining a positive relationship with parents. Similarly, Mitchell (1992) posits that a fairly solid sense of family and community is part of a healthy adolescent identity. For many LGBTT-SQ youth these situations are compromised based on potential reactions and consequences put forth by parents when their children come out to them. "Lesbian and gay adolescents are the only social minority who must learn to manage a stigmatized identity without active support and modelling from parents and family" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 9). More specifically, disclosure of one's sexual identity in adolescence may lead to abandonment, rejection, or violence when parents abruptly learn or discover that their child is LGBTT-SQ (Black & Underwood, 1998; D'Augelli, 1998; Ryan & Futterman; Savin-Williams, 1994).

Mitchell (1992) discusses a challenge to identity formation in terms of experimenting with individuality while fearing exposure of uninviting aspects of oneself that may be rejected by peers. This is likely more pressing in the lives of LGBTT-SQ adolescents when it comes to exploring their sexual identity because risks such as losing friends, experiencing isolation, and verbal or physical harassment/violence from peers are

present if one's 'other' sexuality is revealed (Black & Underwood, 1998; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Black and Underwood further discuss how few school environments provide acceptable opportunities for lesbian adolescents to establish an open and honest network of peers, such as developing friendships, dating, and forming intimate relationships in the same way heterosexual adolescents do.

Ryan and Futterman (1998) acknowledge that adolescence is a time of experimentation and caution that sexual activity during this time is not necessarily reflective of present or future sexual orientation. They further clarify that sexual activity is behaviour and sexual orientation is a part of identity. In relation to identifying as LGBTT-SQ, the age of "coming out" has been dropping steadily. Ryan and Futterman highlight that today's generation of LGBTT-SQ youth have an opportunity to live fully integrated lives, whereas older generations of LGBTT-SQ adults often survived by separating, or compartmentalizing, their social, professional, and emotional lives. However, coming out at younger ages presents issues such as greater stress, more negative social pressure, and greater need for support, particularly from nonjudgmental and informed service providers to avoid isolation. D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger (2002) found that the earlier youths self-identified as LGBTT-SQ and disclosed their sexual orientation to others for the first time, the more they were victimized in high school. One quarter (25%) of the study sample were Canadian youths.

Coming out is an interactive, ongoing process in which LGBTT-SQ persons are aware of their sexual orientation and work to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Troiden (1989) proposed a four-stage model of the coming-out process, acknowledging that stages are not fixed, development will

likely vary between individuals, and queer youth are forging their identity at younger ages. This identity formation model is further likened to a horizontal spiral in which stages overlap and recur in back-and-forth and up-and-down ways.

In the first stage, which occurs prior to puberty, children experience feelings of being "different" from peers. This feeling of 'difference' is not so much reliant on sexuality as it is on gender-role choices or behaviours (e.g., choosing gender-neutral or opposite gender behaviours).

The second stage occurs after puberty, where adolescents become increasingly aware of sexual thoughts and feelings. At the same time, misconceptions about sexuality, homosexuality in particular, have likely been internalized to some extent. Identity confusion and cognitive dissonance may occur at this stage, in part due to an inability to identify with widespread stereotypes and a lack of access to resources or role models who can foster healthy, integrated lives. Another factor that may contribute to identity confusion is the pervasiveness of heterosexualizing socialization practices. Critically, "when heterosexual peers are developing communication and self-disclosure skills that enhance ability to interact and form intimate relationships, lesbian and gay youth are learning how to hide core aspects of identity" (Ryan & Futterman, 1998, p. 11).

Late adolescence or early adulthood provides the time-frame for the third stage, in which many LGBTT-SQ persons begin to self-identify and disclose their identity to other LGBTT-SQ people. It is also during this stage that many LGBTT-SQ persons try to hide their sexual identity through various coping strategies that will be discussed further in the Review of the Literature. Continued separation of sexual and social identities increases one's risk for serious health and mental health problems (e.g., substance abuse,

depression, suicide, and HIV/AIDS) (D'Augelli, 1998; DiPlacido, 1998; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Further information on such mental health issues will be provided in the Impact on LGBTT-SQ Youth/Coping section.

Self-acceptance is the basis of the fourth stage and entails incorporating sexual identity into all aspects of one's life. Coming out is normalized so that information is shared appropriate to the context of various situations and activities.

Stage models have been criticized as being too linear and, as such, fail to account for other aspects of identity such as gender or race. Racial minority youth face additional stressors and challenges in integrating sexual, racial, and ethnic identities (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Critically, racial minority LGBTT-SQ youth are required to manage more than one stigmatized identity, which increases their level of vulnerability and stress. Often racial minority LGBTT-SQ youth are devalued in some way by different communities. For instance, within their ethnic community they receive support that provides a buffer against racism, however their sexual identity is rejected. Similarly, the LGBTT-SQ community often ignores, devalues, or discriminates on the basis of race and ethnicity. Finally, within mainstream society, there is a likelihood that both racial/ethnic identity and sexual identity will be rejected (Division 44, 2000; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Trying to maintain membership within all of these communities can be both exhausting and frustrating, especially if supports are unavailable within each community (Black & Underwood, 1998).

School as Reflection of Society

Education as an institution is one of the most powerful ways (concomitant with the family unit) in which society socializes its children and youth to perpetuate the

"normal," or what is expected behaviour of them as they grow into adults. Tierney (1997) discusses educational institutions as forums of cultural capital and struggle over meaning based on what is taught, by whom, and to whom. What needs to be studied, according to Tierney, is how teaching discussions get framed, carried out, and challenged in addition to who teaches what to whom. This includes providing a framework in which children learn how they should act according to their gender and age. One could argue that the strongest area of socialization within schools is that of heternormativity. Herek (1992) discusses heteronormativity as an ideology "that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community" (p. 89).

The silence around, and exclusion of, LGBTT-SQ issues in school serves to perpetuate heteronormativity because being LGBTT-SQ is seen as 'other' and outside the 'normal.' Heteronormativity can impact education settings in the following ways: curriculum, socialization norms (e.g., dating rules), having role models or a lack of role models, covert discrimination, and overt hostility against lesbians, gay boys/men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons (Black & Underwood, 1998; Chan, 1996). Based on a heteronormative way of living in the world, with heterosexuality holding a privileged position, feelings of fear and dislike of LGBTT-SQ people, or homophobia, often develops (Friend, 1993). This corresponds with the difference as threat and difference as aversive metaphors of prejudice (Hecht, 1998). Furthering this idea is a discussion of how education is delivered in "an environment that may prove to be somewhat hostile for gay and lesbian youths" (McBee & Rogers, 1997, p. 146).

Looking at schools and factors that contribute to unsafe, or hostile, environments is essential in order to be aware of what needs to be changed. It is also necessary to search

for examples of what is possible in terms of creating a safe and respectful atmosphere. Research conducted in the United Kingdom demonstrated that discrimination is rare within schools that actively promote appreciation of difference and a sense of community (Rivers & Soutter, 1996 as cited in Rivers, 1997). Similarly, a study conducted at York University in Toronto found that two factors appear to play a role in reducing levels of bullying. Elements such as reinforcing a philosophy of democratic, pro-social moral values and having students and teachers taking responsibility for promoting good behaviour are more likely to be successful in reducing levels of bullying than those where there is little or no cooperation between students and staff (Pepler, 1996 as cited in Rivers, 1997).

Weinberg (1972, as cited in Lipkin, 1999) emphasized the duality of homophobia in that it is experienced by heterosexuals as fear and hatred when faced with "queerness," as well as by LGBTT-SQ people as discomfort and self-hatred about their own sexuality, or "internalized homophobia." According to Lipkin, internalized homophobia is the result of one's relational and learning environment in combination with the individual's psychological needs and capacity to resist. External factors such as race, religion, family tolerance, geography, and class also influence the experience, or extent of, internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia can result in depression, low self-esteem, and denial of membership in the group—sometimes to the point of despising its members, including oneself. At the same time, one must avoid making assumptions that every discomfort that LGBTT-SQ persons have about their sexuality is related to a lack of self-esteem.

Institutional Exclusion. The most effective way to exclude individuals and groups of people is to deny their existence, thereby making them invisible. This occurs within schools in what Friend (1993) calls "systematic exclusion" (p. 212), wherein role models, images or messages of LGBTT-SQ people and their accomplishments, and discussion of LGBTT-SQ lives, relationships, and communities are silenced. Most secondary school curricula renders the impression that LGBTT-SQ people do not exist (Chan, 1996; Friend, 1993; Unks, 1995). Unks (1995) further describes queer persons, according to their absence from curriculum, as "nonpersons" because they have "fought no battles, held no offices, explored nowhere, written no literature, built nothing, invented nothing, and solved no equations…they did not write poetry, compose music, paint, or sculpt" (p. 5). If LGBTT-SQ students do not see themselves represented in the world portrayed in curricula, how do these individuals form an impression of how they fit into, or have a place in *that* world?

In a study involving gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school students from Chicago, over one third (38.2%) reported that queer issues had been discussed in the classroom. Courses in which sexual identity was discussed included English, social studies, health, sociology, government, and sex education (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997). This is encouraging given the variety of subjects in which queer issues were included. Typically, sexual identity/sexual orientation issues have been incorporated into a sex education curriculum, thereby creating a focus on sexual acts rather than broader issues such as family, community, and accomplishments.

Often there is an absence of openly LGBTT-SQ adults. This becomes especially salient when teachers are closeted because of their daily relationship with students as role

models (Friend, 1993; Unks, 1995). When teachers hide their sexual identity, it can be both confusing and frustrating to LGBTT-SQ students, as well as perpetuating the invisibility of being queer in general (Friend, 1993). This can be frustrating because while there is knowledge that a potential role model exists, access to the role model's knowledge and experience is blocked for fear of outing the teacher and/or oneself. At some level, LGBTT-SQ students may feel slightly less alone with the knowledge that there are closeted teachers at school, indicating that other LGBTT-SQ persons do exist (Friend, 1993). In a study where lesbian women were interviewed about their experiences in high school, six of the 10 lesbian participants knew of lesbian and gay teachers being harassed because of their sexuality (Quinlivan, 1996). This may foster confusion. While potential role models have been identified, at the same time, awareness of the harassment increased students' feelings that there was something wrong with being a lesbian, and that they may be a potential target of harassment because they are lesbian or bisexual (Quinlivan, 1996).

While teachers may be closeted in the school setting, it is essential to understand the context in which they work and make choices. LGBTT-SQ teachers may distance themselves from queer students and/or be reluctant to support sexual minority students for several reasons (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997). Teachers may feel that their careers are at risk if they either identify as LGBTT-SQ or support endeavours of queer students. Another possible reason is a concern over the myth that paedophilia and homosexuality are linked. Therefore teachers may be fearful of being accused of being sexually abusive. A similar fear may be that of being accused of 'recruiting' students to a 'homosexual lifestyle' (Gonsiorek, 1993 as cited in Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth).

Another form of exclusion occurs when school administration and teachers neglect to address, or even acknowledge, harassment directed toward LGBTT-SQ students (Friend, 1993). Harassment may be verbal (e.g., name-calling, taunting) or non-verbal (e.g., vandalism, pushing), and does not have to be targeted directly at a suspected LGBTT-SQ student to be effective in creating an unsafe environment for LGBTT-SQ students and staff in school. In other words, when students call each other names such as "fag," "dyke," or "homo," the level of safety for LGBTT-SQ students to be who they really are is greatly diminished. Related to peer verbal harassment, Carter (1997, as cited in McFarland & Dupuis, 2001) found that the average American high school student hears anti-gay epithets 25 times a day and that teachers fail to respond 97% of the time. Critically, when school officials and teachers do not address these comments and actions there is an implicit permission that these behaviours are acceptable (Friend, 1993). Fontaine (1998) goes further in stating that intolerant educational environments can only exist with the implicit and/or explicit cooperation of school officials and personnel.

Dennis and Harlow (as cited in Friend, 1993) and McFarland and Dupuis (2001) indicate that when incidents of peer harassment and violence are allowed to continue, school officials have failed to provide protection for students and thereby have violated their duty and responsibility to provide for students' safety during the day. In Quinlivan's (1996) study, several lesbian participants reported that teachers had "colluded with the homophobic behaviour of students in several situations" (p. 105). The role of gender division within curriculum has been discussed by Unks (1995) in relation to heterosexism and how gender-divided curricula plays a part in harassment. Subjects in high school have acquired "masculine" and "feminine" associations (e.g., mechanics and science are

seen as masculine whereas literature and music are viewed as feminine). Students who take courses typically associated with their opposite gender face the possibility of receiving homophobic labels such as "fairy" or "dyke," which helps to reinforce students who stay within their own gender-defined subjects (Unks, 1995).

Pervasive silencing of LGBTT-SQ existence in schools is also furthered by the lack, or inaccessibility, of information and resources pertinent to queer youth (Friend, 1993; Malinsky, 1997). Information may be as basic as services provided by, and/or websites for, LGBTT-SQ community centres and youth groups. Friend (1993) discusses the lack of written material available in school libraries as well as how books on queer issues, when available, can be difficult to obtain because they are kept behind the reference desk. One study explored the experiences of 22 lesbian high school students; part of which was the definition of forms of heterosexism in the high school environment (Malinsky, 1997). Many participants commented on the lack of information presented about alternatives to heterosexuality, including written materials. The unavailability of books or articles on this topic were reported by 17 of the students. Critically, one student related that even if materials had been available in her library, she knew not to seek them out for risk of being identified as "a homosexual" (p. 41). This presents an unnecessary paradox of knowing there is information related to oneself, yet needing to deny and hide one's self in order to avoid physical and/or verbal harassment. Even though the books and materials are available, the pervasive underlying silence around LGBTT-SQ issues is so strong that accessing that information is almost impossible.

Stories of the lack of resources and information relating to queer issues contrast with survey results of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in the Chicago area. Results

indicated that close to half (41.2%) of the surveyed students reported that information regarding sexual orientation was available from school staff. Staff most frequently reported to provide this information were school counsellors or social workers, followed by queer teachers and sex education teachers (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997).

Systematic Inclusion. When discussions of being LGBTT-SQ do occur in schools, they are often fostered in a negative context. More specifically, Friend (1993) terms this process as "systematic inclusion" of being LGBTT-SQ as pathological, as only related to sexual behaviour, and/or as being dangerous. An example of LGBTT-SQ issues being presented as pathology or being dangerous is when it is only discussed in relation to AIDS/HIV (Friend, 1993). DiPlacido (1998) also describes how all but a few studies on minority stress among LGBTT-SQ people are focused on HIV infection. Similarly, there is a mis-equation of LGBTT-SQ with sex acts, while heterosexuality is assumed to be the vessel of love, family, and companionship. Heteronormative beliefs and attitudes are perpetuated through the process of systematic inclusion. Moreover, the implicit message of consistently associating LGBTT-SQ discussions with pathology, sexual behaviour, and danger is one of sickness, death, being unnatural or abnormal, and ultimately being 'wrong' or a bad person (Friend, 1993; McFarland & Dupuis, 2001).

Peer Policing. "The victimization of lesbians and gay men, through either verbal harassment or varying degrees of physical assault, is the most common kind of bias-related violence" (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995, p. 65) and could be seen as an extreme form of social control. Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) found that attacks on LGBTT-SQ youth occurred at home, at work, at school, and in the broader community environment. Critically, one quarter of the youth in this study reported anti-LGBTT-SQ

abuse from students at school. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, one in three queer students were bullied or victimized in adolescence because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (Rivers, 2001 as cited in Imich, Bayley, & Farley, 2001).

A significant element of regulating the school environment (e.g., student beliefs and behaviour) is how peers construct or define roles, especially sex and gender roles. According to Fontaine (1998) "antigay harassment serves to enforce rigid standards of gender-appropriate behavior" (p. 8). She further explains how both straight and queer students will avoid deviating from society's sex and gender norms for fear of being labelled as 'gay,' thus being potentially targeted for verbal/physical harassment. According to Quinlivan (1996), "peers police each other" (p. 104), thereby encouraging certain behaviours such as hetero or male/female pairing. When students do not meet these expectations, they are often abused and ostracized in an attempt to bring their beliefs and actions in line with traditional representations of sexuality (Quinlivan, 1996). In a recent study including queer youth from Canada (25%), the United States (73%), and New Zealand (2%), openness in high school and gender atypicality significantly contributed to verbal harassment related to sexual orientation (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). In particular, "the more gender atypical youths appeared, the more often they were attacked verbally" (p. 158).

McBee and Rogers (1997) stated that as LGBTT-SQ students have been increasingly open about their sexuality, verbal and physical attacks on LGBTT-SQ individuals have increased. This has also been supported in a recent study that found that the more open youths were about their sexual orientation in high school, the more they were victimized (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). This is in accordance with

Hecht's (1998) statement that an increase in separation and negative emotionality has been associated with higher visibility of minorities.

D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger (2002) conducted a study with 350 queer youth, of whom 25% were Canadian. Of the 350 queer youth surveyed, more than half (59%) experienced verbal abuse in high school, 24% were threatened with violence, 11% had objects thrown at them, 11% had been physically attacked, 2% were threatened with weapons, 5% were sexually assaulted, and 20% had been threatened with the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Perhaps more disturbing than this list is that over half (54%) experienced three or more instances of verbal abuse in high school. Also important to note is that males were victimized significantly more than females. Incidents of verbal abuse and physical violence appear to be lower in this study compared to experiences of queer youth in the United Kingdom.

In a study conducted in the United Kingdom with 190 gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults who discussed their school experiences, direct behaviours such as name-calling (82%), physical violence (60%), and teasing (58%) were experienced. More subtle forms of harassment that were experienced by these participants included: having rumours spread about them (59%), being frightened by the way someone stared at them in class (52%), personal belongings were stolen (44%), and being isolated by peers (27%) (Rivers, 1997a as cited in Rivers, 1997).

A retrospective American study found that 59% of gay male participants experienced victimization in high school and 21% of lesbian participants were victimized in high school (Gross, Aurand, & Adessa, 1988 as cited in Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). In another retrospective study of American adults, 33% to 49% of the respondents

reported having been victimized in school, presumably high school (Berrill, 1990 as cited in Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). A study conducted with ethnic-minority youths in New York City, reported that 46% had experienced violent physical attacks because of their sexual identity (Hunter & Schaecher, 1990 as cited in Savin-Williams, 1994). It appears that the incidence of victimization in Canadian and American schools based on sexual identity has remained at similar rates between 1988 and 2002 (ranging between 2% and 59% depending on the nature of the experience being discussed).

Furthermore, a survey of the Los Angeles County school system found that the high prevalence of anti-LGBTT-SQ abuse inflicted by classmates was apparently pre-meditated and that the incidence is escalating dramatically (Peterson, 1989 as cited in Savin-Williams, 1994). Most importantly, and perhaps most disturbing, is that "the most frequent abusers were fellow teenagers" (Savin-Williams, 1994, p. 262). Several of the studies that Savin-Williams (1994) discusses report that over half of their adolescent participants had been ridiculed by classmates or had received regular verbal abuse from peers.

In a report prepared for the United Church of Canada (Fisher, 1999) on behalf of EGALE Canada, positive changes that have taken place in the struggle for LGBTT-SQ equality are highlighted. Progress is seen in an increase in LGBTT-SQ youth groups, access to resources and information, more supportive social and school environments, as well as a growing queer community. Youth-run initiatives exist all over Canada, including Youth Understanding Youth in Edmonton (Grace & Wells, in press), Pink Triangle Services Youth in Ottawa and Victoria Youth Pride Society (Fisher, 1999). Alternative learning environments such as the Triangle Program in Toronto provide a safe

place to learn for up to 18 months, in addition to a curriculum that emphasizes the contribution of gays and lesbians in various fields (Dwyer & Farran, 1997; Fisher, 1999).

Counsellors. Counselling staff in schools have the potential to help develop a safe, positive environment for LGBTT-SQ students. This can be accomplished on a global scale by facilitating or sponsoring school-wide projects and on an individual level by providing support and counselling to LGBTT-SQ students. Although these are essential roles that counsellors can play, two studies reveal that counsellors are often not perceived as being approachable or helpful by lesbian students. The majority (70% or19 out of 27) of the participants in one study reported that schools are "failing to provide counselling" (Malinsky, 1997, p.43) and that only two participants felt comfortable discussing sexuality/sexual orientation with their counsellors.

Quinlivan (1993) indicated that all but three of her participants "perceived counsellors to be ill informed, untrustworthy and not worth talking to" (p. 105). Also, three participants saw the school counsellors as untrustworthy and lacking in confidentiality, thereby preventing the lesbian student participants from approaching their counsellors for support. This provides a strong indication that counsellors (along with teachers, administrators, and students) can play a far more visible role in advocating for the safety and inclusion for all students, particularly queer/marginalized students.

In comparison, several studies indicate that queer students are comfortable speaking with, or approaching, counsellors about sexual identity issues. Also, exciting initiatives and programs relating to school counsellors and their role in facilitating a safe space for all students are emerging. One study found that 25% of their sample felt comfortable talking to counsellors about their sexual orientation. Also, most of these

students had a generally positive response from both teachers and counsellors after disclosure (Telljohann & Price, 1993 as cited in Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997). In a survey of Pennsylvania school counsellors, many of the gay and lesbian students (51%) actually seen by counsellors were self-referred as compared to being teacher-referred (Fontaine, 1998). This provides some indication that the students referred to in this survey were comfortable in approaching their school counsellor to discuss sexual identity issues.

In terms of program development in support of queer issues, the Calgary Board of Education approved an "Action Plan on Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Youth and Staff Safety." This action plan requires that guidance counsellors provide comprehensive information to students when discussing sexual orientation (Dwyer & Farran, 1997). A more questionable element of this plan is to encourage students to discuss this issue with their parents. While this is an important point to consider, the student's safety must be the first priority in negotiating whether to talk with parents or not about his/her sexual orientation.

An exciting program developed at an alternative high school in Fort Collins, Colorado involves the collaborative efforts of counsellors and students (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998). This is in accordance with findings by Pepler (1996, as cited by Rivers, 1997) in which levels of bullying/harassment were reduced when teachers and students took responsibility for respect and tolerance within the school environment. The program stems from an overall school goal of promoting tolerance of diversity. As such, school-wide workshops were organized and facilitated by students on topics such as racism, gender equity, sexuality/sexual orientation, and religious discrimination. The overall theme of each topic/workshop was 'hate hurts.' Workshops were strongly

supported by the school administration and every student was encouraged to attend each day-long workshop. Students who opted out of workshops could attend a separate session focused on diversity issues, yet on a more general level.

Impact on LGBTT-SQ Youth/Coping

The effects of institutional exclusion, systematic inclusion, physical and verbal harassment are multiple in nature. On an external level, the body is injured or harmed in some way. At a fundamental level, a student's sense of safety is compromised when unaddressed verbal harassment occurs. Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) found that 31% of LGBTT-SQ youth that they surveyed feared verbal abuse at school and 26% feared physical abuse at school. In a more recent study, in which 25% of the participants were Canadian, these levels of fear appear to have increased (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). For example, 43% reported 'some' to 'extreme' fear of verbal harassment and 44% reported 'some' fear of being physically attacked at school. Living in such a state of fear likely impacts the learning that these youth can experience.

Feelings of exclusion and isolation may occur during interactions with peers, especially when peers discuss topics such as heterosexual dating relationships (Quinlivan, 1996). In a phenomenological study of the experiences of queer youth, four categories related to recurring experiences of these youth were identified (Omizo, Omizo, & Okamoto, 1998). General categories of experiences included: confusion and not being understood, fear and negative reaction from others, concern about the future, and internalized hostility. Living as a marginalized LGBTT-SQ youth in a heteronormative culture has been associated with increased drug/alcohol use, feelings of depression, lower

self-esteem, prostitution, homelessness, and risk of committing suicide (Savin-Williams, 1994).

Drug/Alcohol Use. Savin-Williams (1994) summarizes studies of alcohol and drug use among LGBTT-SQ youth indicating that lifetime prevalence rates for LGBTT-SQ youth are noticeably higher than U. S. national survey samples. For example, lifetime prevalence rates for LGBTT-SQ youth are 50% higher for alcohol, three times higher for marijuana, and eight times higher for cocaine/crack (Savin-Williams, 1994). It is further discussed that LGBTT-SQ persons use alcohol and drugs for much the same reasons as heterosexual youths such as peer pressure and pleasure-seeking, in addition to reasons associated with their sexual identity. Such reasons may include attempting to quell increasing awareness that they are "different" or that their life ahead may be difficult due to being out and/or needing to hide one's sexuality.

Depression and Self-Esteem. In a survey of Pennsylvania school counsellors, the three most common issues for queer students were poor self-esteem, depression, and self-doubt, which were broadly grouped as sense-of-self issues (Fontaine, 1998). Hiding one's sexual identity implicitly requires careful monitoring of all interactions as well as an awareness that relationships are based on a lie that could be exposed at any time (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). The stress of hiding one's identity is associated with mental health issues such as depression and low self-esteem. Fontaine (1998) elaborates on this concept in that "learning to play the heterosexual game with no hope or intention of winning, having to constantly fake being genuine, while finding ways to avoid heterosexual liaison often leads to self destruction, high levels of anxiety, extreme hypervigilance, and self-loathing" (p. 18). As discussed previously, discrimination, prejudice, harassment, peer

and family rejection, and internalized homophobia also have an effect on personal well-being, including low self-esteem (D'Augelli, 1998; Lipkin, 1999; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Rivers, 1997).

In a phenomenological study with gay and lesbian youth, participants indicated that there were times when they felt lonely and depressed, especially when there was no one to talk with about their concerns (Omizo, Omizo, & Okamoto, 1998). Rothblum (1990) highlighted that research on depression among lesbians has been virtually absent, so information is typically deduced from research on suicide, alcoholism, and sexual abuse among lesbians. In relation to lesbian relationships and self-esteem, one study found a positive correlation between involvement in a lesbian relationship and self-esteem, self-acceptance, and social support (Leavy & Adams, 1986 as cited in Rothblum, 1990). Self-esteem is particularly significant because self-acceptance is the most powerful predictor of mental health in queer youth (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995).

Not surprisingly, Ryan and Futterman (1998) summarize several studies which reported that lesbians and gay males who have integrated a positive identity possess higher psychological adjustment, greater satisfaction, and higher self-concept; with lower rates of depression or stress than LGBTT-SQ persons in conflict with their identity. Black and Underwood (1998) also assert that most adult queer persons lead happy, stable, and productive lives. Furthermore, the struggles experienced by many lesbians in developing a positive identity often result in increased coping skills. However, Ryan and Futterman (1998) also acknowledge that the process and time it takes to reach a positive identity is facilitated by supportive peers and adults (Rothblum, 1990), accurate information, and

connection with a community that is validating and accepting--things that are often missing in the lives of LGBTT-SQ youth.

Prostitution and Homelessness. In a Canadian study based in Vancouver, findings indicated that a disproportionate number of street youth in Vancouver identified themselves as gay or bisexual (Fisher, 1999). These findings were presented as possibly being indicative of a high dropout rate for students who find themselves facing an unsupportive school environment. Coleman (1989, as cited in Savin-Williams, 1994) reviewed empirical and clinical literature related to prostitution among American male adolescents and found that at least two thirds of male prostitutes are gay or bisexual. The rate of prostitution in lesbian youth is virtually unknown. Savin-Williams (1994) discusses one study with a small sample, indicating that 5 of 20 Hispanic and Black New York City lesbian adolescents had exchanged sex for money or drugs.

Coleman (1989, as cited in Savin-Williams, 1994) reported that many gay youth prostitutes drop out of school, use drugs and alcohol, and run away from home or are thrown out by the family because of their sexual orientation. Over half said they had been physically or sexually abused. Again, little information is available on lesbian youth prostitutes.

According to U. S. national surveys on youth runaways, between 2% and 6% of all runaways identified themselves as LGBTT-SQ or were reported by shelter staff to be LGBTT-SQ (Savin-Williams, 1994). These studies have limitations such as basing estimates on the reports of shelter staff and neglecting to acknowledge that these percentages are likely underestimates because few youths are likely to tell authorities (e.g., shelter staff) their sexual identity. Alternately, Savin-Williams (1994) highlights

that when LGBTT-SQ youth are asked if they have ever run away, nearly one half of bisexual and gay male youths in one study had run away at least once; many repeatedly.

Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts. D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger's study (2002), in which 25% of participants were Canadian, found that 42% of males and 25% of females stated that they had sometimes or often thought of suicide. Almost half (48%) reported that their suicidal thinking was connected to their sexual orientation and 22% said their sexual orientation was very related. A study conducted by Kroll and Warneke (1995, as cited in Fisher, 1999), out of the University of Calgary, concluded that Canada has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world. Also, approximately one third of all adolescents who commit suicide appear to have a lesbian, gay, or bisexual orientation. Rivers (1997a, as cited in Rivers, 1997) conducted a study in which experiences of harassment were correlated with suicidal thoughts. Rivers found that over half (53%) of participants who were harassed contemplated suicide or other forms of self-harm. Nearly half (40%) of participants who experienced harassment attempted suicide at least on one occasion, and nearly one third (30%) on more than on occasion.

Suicide attempts are two to eight times greater in LGBTT-SQ youth samples than in heterosexual youth samples (Bagley & Tremblay, 2000). In a University of Calgary study with gay male youths, Bagley and Tremblay (1997, as cited in Bagley & Tremblay, 2000) found that suicide attempts increased to being 13.9 times greater in gay male youth samples than non-gay male youth. This is likely due to the use of a computer-response format to collect survey responses. Participants probably felt safer revealing such information to a computer rather than in an interview format. These results were replicated by Tremblay (2000). Studies have shown that gay and bisexual youth who

attempt suicide show they were more likely to have self-identified as gay or bisexual, to have come out to others at younger ages, to have friends and relatives who attempted or committed suicide, and to have been rejected because of their sexual orientation (D'Augelli, 1998; Hershberger & Pilkington, 1997; Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

In the pivotal U. S. Report of Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide, Gibson (1989) identified risk factors that affect emerging gay and lesbian youth. Risk factors include: (a) the negative and hostile attitudes of society toward homosexuality, (b) low self-esteem due to internalization of a negative image based on false stereotypes about homosexuality, (c) facing more verbal abuse from family members compared to other youth, (d) failure of schools to adequately protect LGBTT-SQ youth against verbal and physical assaults, (e) LGBTT-SQ youth who are open about their sexual orientation are often rejected by non-LGBTT-SQ peers, and (f) emerging LGBTT-SQ youth cope with many of these issues by using alcohol and drugs.

McBee and Rogers (1997) expanded on several of these risk factors and identified previous attempts, identity confusion (i.e., there is a lack of positive role models for gay and lesbian youths that could foster a constructive identity development process), and in subsequent years, social inequity (e.g., loss of job security and lack of access to rights afforded to married couples) as risk factors of suicidal behaviours in LGBTT-SQ individuals.

Resilience/Coping Strategies. Coping or survival strategies can be utilized by LGBTT-SQ persons in order to provide protection from potential rejection, verbal or physical harassment, and isolation. Coping strategies and behaviours can include: passing as heterosexual in most, or all, interactions; denying same-sex feelings; avoiding

situations that might confirm sexual identity; trying to change sexual orientation by engaging in heterosexual activity; adopting asexual roles or roles that suppress one's sexual self (e.g., over-achiever, problem-solver role, model student or friend); using alcohol or drugs to repress same-sex feelings; or trying to rationalize feelings as being only temporary (Black & Underwood, 1998; DiPlacido, 1998; Quinlivan, 1996; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994).

Although stories of resilience and strength-based coping have been scarce in the literature, Jordan, Vaughan, and Woodworth (1997) highlight a shift in focus from views of queer persons needing to hide their sexual identity to one of celebrating the powerful and creative resilience that has carried them into adulthood. As Ryan and Futterman (1998) indicate, queer youth are coming out at younger ages. This can create struggles such as being rejected by friends and facing harassment. However, as is being seen more frequently, students are being proactive and assertive by initiating groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances. These alliances work to foster safe spaces and respect for diversity through projects such as sponsoring lectures and films on gay/lesbian history, hosting gay and lesbian awareness days, and supporting students in coming out (Blumenfeld, 1995; Grace & Wells, in press; Lipkin, 1999; Woog, 1995). LGBTT-SQ students are also taking their same-sex dates to dances and proms. For example, Marc Hall was recently allowed to take his boyfriend, Jean-Paul Dumond, to his school prom after an Ontario Superior Court injunction forced the Durham Catholic District School Board to allow Marc to attend the event (CBC News On-line, 2002).

A context has been provided for this study in which societal prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination have been explained from a North American perspective.

A central component of North American culture that contributes to intolerance toward queer persons is heteronormativity. How heteronormativity impacts adolescent development was explored, in addition to ways in which heteronormativity can be experienced in schools. Particularly important to this study was a discussion focused on the coping/resilience strategies utilized by queer youth and shifting the focus from emphasizing negative experiences to honing in on stories of strength, resilience, and positive change. Within this context, it was imperative that this research focus on the participant's experiences as well as understand these experiences through the participant's own words. As such, the research method chosen for this study was a combination of case study and narrative inquiry approaches.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Hearing the participant's stories through her own voice and providing context (hers, society's) for these stories was essential to honour and respect the participant's experiences. Credibility of this study was, in part, maintained through triangulation. This consisted of the narrative of the research participant, related literature, and critical readings by several readers. The inclusion of my story, as it flows toward, around, and away from Jen's, follows a narrative approach to inquiry in that researchers also need to tell their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin further relate that researcher's stories merge with participant's stories to create new ones. In summary, this study will follow a case study-narrative inquiry approach.

Case Study

Disparity exists in the literature regarding the nature and definition of case study research. Yin (1989) states that a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (as opposed to a historical event) within its real-life context, has boundaries between phenomenon and context that are not clearly evident (compared to experiments in which the context is controlled), and uses multiple data-gathering techniques. Berg (1998) concurs with Yin (1989) in that the case study approach is not simply a data-gathering technique, but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data-gathering measures. This study looks at how high school was experienced by a lesbian student; provides a social, political, and interpersonal context in which to understand the experiences/stories; and uses strategies such as interviewing, autobiography, and reviewing the literature to gather data. In contrast, Stake (1994) does not view the case

study as a research method, but a choice of 'object' to be studied. Of particular importance is that individual cases, not the method of inquiry, define the study. Part of identifying an individual case is assessing whether it is a specific, bounded system. In this case, experiencing high school as a lesbian is what bounds the system.

Stake (1994) further identifies three types of study depending on where the interest in the case lies. An intrinsic case study is pursued because the case in itself is of interest. Accordingly, the researcher puts curiousities aside so that the case may reveal its story. Instrumental case studies involve the examination of a particular case because it can provide insight into an issue or contribute to the refinement of theory. Choosing the case rests on its ability to advance an understanding of that other interest. A collective case study is an instrumental study extended to several cases. This research follows an intrinsic case study approach. More specifically, I was interested in exploring what the participant's experiences of high school meant for her, how these meanings were created, and how they might have changed during the collaborative research process.

Edwards (1998) asserts that case-based approaches share certain assumptions. Human behaviour is not seen as a matrix of variables used to predict outcomes. Such reliance on mathematical models provides limited insight into what Edwards calls 'real' psychological and interpersonal process. Therefore, quantification is not seen as an end in itself. In contrast, the value of case-based research can be found in the in-depth and personal/experiential nature of collected material. This is particularly evident in the way participants are treated as individuals whose stories merit exploration and understanding. Another key assumption is that context is relevant and warrants elaboration so that meaningful relationships within a single case can be examined.

There are numerous benefits to choosing a case study approach. Conducting a case study enables the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, while collecting extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth information (Berg, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1989). In particular, a case study approach provides a space where participants can express their perceptions or judgments as they relate to the description and construction of understanding. Data, then, can be more open, complex, and present multiple perspectives (Simons, 1996). Related to an inherent interest in the participant is the fact that cases can be written vividly, using the "subject's own words, in a way that invites the reader into an empathic response to the experience of the subject being studied" (Edwards, 1996, p. 15). On a more general level, case study research allows for the testing of existing generalizations and the proposal of new conceptual distinctions or hypotheses (Edwards, 1996). In addition, a case study approach can provide us with an understanding of complex issues, extend experience, or add strength to what is already known through previous research (Soy, 1997). Yin (1989) distinguishes between case and unit of analysis. In this study, the case is Jen and her high school experiences and the unit of analysis is her narratives, or stories, that describe her experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2000), narrative inquiry is the study of ways humans experience the world. Also important to recognize is that "any account of experience will be particularly bound by context" (Stiles, 1993, p. 596). From a narrative inquiry viewpoint, experience is "the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones....Stories, lived and

told, educate the self and others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). Through stories or narratives, an opportunity is presented in which individual or group experiences can be better understood. In most narratives, events are described through the teller's perception of their meaning, relevance, and importance. Events are not simply reported. Hearing the participant's stories through her own voice and providing context (hers, mine, society's) for these stories provide ways to honour, respect, and texture her experiences.

Narrative inquiry holds paramount the concept of maintaining a sense of the whole throughout the research process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This holistic approach to research stems from collecting a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings (Connelly & Clandinin). In other words, by keeping in perspective the richness of particular details revealed in narrative, a sense of the overall narrative, or larger picture, can be experienced. What the researcher needs to do is bring out the hidden meanings in the text (Denzin & Lincoln; Janesick, 1994).

Within narrative inquiry, consideration for trust in, and fairness toward, participants is a first priority (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). This, in part, stems from an inherent belief that a collaboration exists within the research relationship. Collaboration necessitates time, building a relationship, space, and voice. The concept of voice is unique in narrative inquiry in that both participant and researcher have voice. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) stated, "we found that merely listening, recording, and fostering participant story telling was both impossible....and unsatisfying. We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. Scribes we were not; story tellers and story livers we are. And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new

stories" (p. 12). This pluri-vocal experience involves mutual storytelling and re-storying. Accordingly, the researcher needs to be aware of building a relationship in which both voices are heard (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Related to voice is the concept of "connected knowing" (Connelly & Clandinin); a process of self-insertion into the other's story as a way of coming to know the other's story and as giving the other voice. A central element to this is affirming or entering into someone's thinking and perceiving to better understand his/her experience.

Narrative inquiry is situated within a three dimensional space that allows us to travel "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Thus, in any inquiry there are four directions. Inward movement leads to feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. Moving outward focuses on interactions between the person and the environment. Forward and backward directions involve temporal issues. The three dimensional space includes the "personal and social (interaction); past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 50). Narrative analysis provides a framework of time (beginning, middle, end) and place (characters formed, physical place, context) to organize episodes, actions, and accounts of actions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Kvale, 1996).

The metaphorical three dimensional space is challenging for the researcher because each component must be considered at all times. At the same time, when field texts are composed, researchers much position their field texts into this three dimensional inquiry. Utilizing a three dimensional inquiry helps the researcher discover and construct meaning in field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly also assert

that "without careful positioning of our field texts, and our explicit acknowledgment of how they are positioned, the research texts ultimately constructed from them are endlessly open to unanswerable questions and criticisms about knowledge claims being made and meanings generated" (p. 118).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss the process of moving from field text to research text. Field texts are "close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events" (p. 132). Research texts, on the other hand, look for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (p. 132). To begin the process of moving between field text to research text, initial analysis takes place in order to chronicle or summarize what is contained in the field texts. Possible narrative codes used in the initial analysis are: names of characters, places where actions or events occurred, storylines that interconnect, tensions that emerge, an end point, the context in which events or actions occurred, and continuities or discontinuities that appear. Narrative coding and the repeated reading of field texts allows patterns and themes to emerge.

The move from field text to research text is complex, therefore a series of steps will not be enough to complete this process. "Negotiation occurs from beginning to end. Plotlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials, and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Part of this overall process is the creation of a variety of interim texts, or "texts situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 133). The analyzing and writing

stages of research also indicate a time where researchers can interweave their stories together with the stories of research participants.

Using the Case Study-Narrative Approach

Ethics

Undertaking a research journey necessitates that ethical issues be at the forefront of one's mind. When research involves interaction with another person, certain ethical issues need to be addressed. Such issues include: informed consent, potential harm and risk for participants, honesty and trustworthiness of research, as well as privacy and confidentiality (Kvale, 1996; McLeod, 1999; Punch, 1994). Researchers need to be aware of these issues throughout the research process, even once it has been completed.

Ethical issues relevant to my research were addressed in the ethics review submitted to the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. In the initial meeting with my participant, we discussed issues related to this research in order for informed consent to be possible. A verbal explanation, as well as a written document were provided (see Appendix A) prior to signing the informed consent form. The interview began once the consent form was signed. The participant's name and any identifying information were altered to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Participant

After advertising occurred on province-wide websites; LGBTT-SQ community centres and/or member e-mails; in a local newspaper; through word of mouth; and posters on a university campus, I received phone calls and e-mail responses from four women.

From four responses received, one person was chosen to participate in this project. Three of the respondents did not meet criteria set out for this study.

Jen was 18 years old at the time of the initial interview. She had been out of high school for four months and was attending a city college at the time of interviewing. She started grade 10 in a small town high school in Alberta. Shortly after grade 10 started, her father died, and as a result, she moved to Edmonton to live with an older sister and attend school. It was in this city school that she came out as bisexual in grade 10 and self-identified as lesbian later in high school.

Procedure

Jen contacted me through e-mail after a friend had forwarded one of my advertisements to her. We conversed over e-mail to set up a time to meet for an interview. I also provided her with some background information related to the research. We met twice on the University of Alberta campus for interviews and once in a coffee shop to review interim texts and further explore some points. In our first meeting, I discussed the project in more detail and received Jen's permission to tape record the interviews. This allowed me to focus on our discussions and participate freely. I used an interview guide approach (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000) which requires that issues to be covered in the interview are specified in advance in an outline form (see Appendix B). However, during the interview, the interviewer can decide the sequence and wording of questions. In this way the interview is semi-structured, allowing the interview to progress in a fluid, flexible manner.

Interviews were audiotaped or responses were written verbatim. The first interview, 1.5 hours in length, was audiotaped and transcribed. Verbatim responses from

the second and third interviews were handwritten. The last two interviews/meetings were one hour each. When inconsistencies or discrepancies appeared in experiences that Jen shared, I clarified these through further questioning within the interview or at a subsequent meeting.

Presenting and Analyzing the Interviews

The interviews explored one participant's experiences of high school as an out lesbian. Interviews were transcribed from the audiotapes to written texts. Using the transcriptions, I read, re-read, and listened to the interviews repeatedly to note any themes. These themes were grouped and re-grouped to form broader themes and to find possible connections between the different experiences that Jen shared with me over three interviews. Identified themes were divided into categories and sub-categories and common ideas were grouped and sorted from general to specific. These broader themes were then used to structure the final narrative. While working on the narrative analysis, I kept in mind the three dimensional inquiry space as well as the need to share Jen's story in her own words and from her perspective. At the same time, I was aware that I needed to connect the participant's stories to my own and to the research issue. In this way, the context helped me choose stories to share from the participant's narrative. I shared interim texts with the participant which included the themes that had emerged. She was free to change, delete, or comment on any of this information. Once it was worked out that each story was what the participant wanted told, I interwove these stories with my own.

Credibility

Stiles (1993) discusses how qualitative research shifts from seeking statements that can be generalized (quantitative approach) to facilitating or deepening the understanding of the people who read the statements. Case studies have been described as a preferred research method because they can present information "in harmony with the reader's experience and thus [provide] to that person a natural basis for generalization" (Simons, 1996, p. 230). Although the term generalization is used by Simons, it has a different meaning than that used in quantitatively oriented research. The concept of "applicability" might be more aptly suited to qualitative research than using the term generalization. Applicability is "the extent to which [results and conclusions] facilitate readers' adapting the ideas to their own contexts" (Stiles, 1993, p. 598).

Another element that aids in maintaining credibility of findings in qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the interpretations (Girden, 2001; Stiles, 1993). Trustworthiness, or coherence, can be re-phrased as, "Does it hang together?" (Stiles, p. 608) and includes internal consistency, comprehensiveness of the elements to be interpreted, as well as relations between elements. Girden asserts that interpretations are trustworthy if they are "plausible and reasonable, they are supported by reports by the narrator, and alternative interpretations have been considered" (p. 50). Yin (1989) furthers this by emphasizing the importance of critically examining the document to look for ways the report is incomplete, displaying sufficient evidence to gain the reader's confidence that all avenues have been explored, clearly communicating the boundaries of the case, and giving special attention to conflicting propositions.

Triangulation is a method used to strengthen studies by seeking information in multiple ways. It serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1994; Stiles, 1993). Part of triangulation is the notion that interpretations honour alternative constructions including those of participants (Stiles, 1993). Patton describes four types of triangulation (data, investigator, theory, and methodological), two of which were utilized in this study. Data triangulation involves using a variety of data sources and investigator triangulation is the use of several different researchers or evaluators (Patton).

In this study data was collected during three interviews with one participant and the literature review. Elements of investigator triangulation used in this study include critical readings of interim and/or final texts, credibility or testimonial validity, and reflexive validity. Throughout the writing process, I submitted interim texts to external readers to "iteratively try out interpretations on other investigators" (Stiles, p. 612). Part of this consisted of asking representative audience groups to review and comment on the interim texts (Yin, 1989). More importantly, I presented interim and final texts to Jen to assess their level of testimonial validity or credibility. Credibility is the extent to which researchers' interpretations fit with participants' experiences of events (Stiles). Another form of validity that Stiles discusses is reflexive validity, which refers to "how the researcher's way of thinking is changed by the data" (p. 612). Personal learning that occurred during this research process will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

Jen's Out-Look on High School

An outline format interview was conducted with Jen that allowed an element of free flow of information to be provided about life inside and outside of high school. Themes were identified from the stories that Jen shared. Issues such as Jen's expectations of a high school atmosphere, peer interactions, coping/resilience strategies, and suggestions for action in schools appeared to be prevalent throughout the interviews. It is essential to note that although seemingly encapsulated themes have been identified, there was an interwoven connection between them. In addition, although the focus of this research was on Jen's high school experiences, there are other elements that were inextricably linked such as her family, childhood context, and coping strategies utilized outside of school.

About Jen

Jen grew up in a small town in Alberta with three sisters and one brother. She described the religious focus of the town she lived in, and how it played a part in the schools she attended in the town.

> There's only 3,000 people and everyone is ultra-religious, except for my family. We didn't believe in God, and so we were always kind of on the outskirts of things. They liked us but we were a little bit extreme because we didn't believe in God, and just not believing in God was bad enough but they found out that we [had a gay family member]. You know, "Oh my God!"

Jen's family was placed on the outskirts of the town's sense of community because of their religious stance. Once some of the townspeople learned that someone in Jen's family was gay, the siblings/family were marginalized even further. This was framed by the way in which Jen situated her family within the town environment. Jen explained that as she grew older she came to know gay and lesbian people through her family.

> My family never had an issue with homosexuality. We had friends who were gay and stuff and it was just normal to us. But, for people outside of our family to see us with openly gay people was adding to the rumours that spread about our family. So, yah, it was different [than living in a city].

Another significant element to Jen's story was her family and how supportive they have been. Jen clarified that she does not have parents since her mother passed away when she was 12 years old, and her father passed away when she was 15 years old. When her father passed away, Jen moved to the city to live with her sister, who had become Jen's guardian. Although Jen did not have the chance to come out to her parents, she talked about what she thought might have happened.

> Yah, my family was pretty cool about it. I don't know how my parents would have reacted. My father, my dad passed away when I was 15 and my mom when I was 12, so I didn't really get a chance to tell them. But, I'm sure my dad would have looked up from the paper and said, "Oh, that's neat" and then looked back at the paper. Cuz he just didn't really, it didn't phase him very much when you said things to him that were supposed to shock him.

> And I don't know about my mom. She, she always wanted the perfect kids. She was manic depressive, so she wanted the perfect kids and I don't know how sexuality would have fit into it really. It would have been one extreme or the other with her. She would have been totally cool with it or totally not cool with it. So, I don't really know. I didn't know my mom very well. But, yah, I'm not sure.

Expectations for, and the ongoing nature of, the coming out process was described in relation to Jen's brother and sisters. Jen's brother was the first person she told. He was verbally supportive of Jen's process, letting her know that it was okay if she was bisexual, prior to her coming out to him. Jen expressed surprise that her sisters "already knew" before she told them. With Jen's sister/guardian there was a different sense of not knowing how her sister would react, as well as concern about her reaction because this was the sister who provided necessities such as food and shelter. Jen went on to describe what she was expecting to happen with her sister.

> I was totally unsure as to how they were going to react. Cuz they have queer friends, but it's different when it's in the family for some people. And, she's the sister that I'm not really close to so I was a little worried, but she was fine with it.

> I mean, my little brother was the first person I told. And I was telling him about all my cool new bisexual friends and how all these gay guys were just really fun to hang out with. And he kept saying, "You

know it would be cool if you were bisexual, right Jen?" I was like "Oh yah, yah, but I'm not." And, for about three months, I said that to him. And he kept saying it back. And then he said it one night and I just said, "Yah, you know what, I'm going to tell him. Yah I am gay." And then a few months later I came out as gay. That was cool. That was still cool with him.

....and then I told the rest of my sisters and they were like, "Yah, I know." I was like, "What? How do you know? Did [brother] tell you?" They're like, "No, we just know. You're my sister." It was pretty bizarre. I guess you don't notice that people know you so well or that you can play the pronoun game so badly that people kind of guessed it.

The hardest one to tell was my sister who I lived with because she's my guardian. And her and her husband took care of me. I went down into the kitchen, they were studying for exams, I chose a really bad time to tell them....I said, "Guys, I really need to talk to you." And I started crying. My sister thought I was pregnant, which made me almost laugh while I was crying....I told them and they were like, "That's okay, and that doesn't really surprise me, actually." I was like, "What?" This is supposed to be a shock and you're supposed to, you know, talk to me about it....It was nice not to have to defend myself

> but I always kind of like the battle, too….I wanted them to be positive and stuff but I kinda wanted to talk about it.

Jen's self-reflection about enjoying the battle and liking to confront issues was prevalent throughout our interviews. It provided some background and an indication of Jen's coping strategies, as well as her feistiness in dealing with barriers or conflict.

When reflecting on her experiences of living in a small town and a city, Jen felt fortunate that she was able to live in both. It provided her with perspectives that she could compare and contrast. Jen related that she did not hold any anger or regret at having lived in Small Town, while also feeling relief that she does not live there anymore because of how limiting and closed-minded it was.

> I'm really lucky that way because I did see both extremes. I'm not angry at Small Town or anything. I mean, it was a nice place to grow up but at the same time, when I go back there and start talking to my friends, it's like, "(sigh) thank God I don't live here anymore," you guys are so closed-minded. They're great people, they just are not exposed to anything because it's such a close knit community…..I'm kinda glad that my family wasn't a part of that cuz just being on the outside while I was there was kinda cool so you could compare. But, stepping back like I have coming to City was just, it's insane how different it was.

Not only did Jen express an appreciation for where she is at in her life now, she also acknowledged that she enjoyed being on the outskirts of Small Town because it provided her an outsider view while living within the town. With some overall context provided in

relation to Jen's background and previous experiences, we can further explore her experiences within the high school realm.

Expectations of High School

Two months into the grade 10 school year, Jen became a student at a large city high school. Since Jen was coming from outside of the city, she was scheduled to tour City High Schools 'A' and 'B' to decide which she would prefer to attend. Jen toured City High School 'A' first, saw how open it was, and chose to attend this school without formally touring School 'B'. She described her school as an open and welcoming place, and at the same time, Jen acknowledged that her school was likely unique from other high schools.

> …so it's not the same as other high schools. It might not be realistic compared to other high schools because it's such an open environment. It's just really accepting and there is a really large queer population there. Because of how accepting we are and because it's an arts school, and the stereotypes are there for a reason. So, it was, I don't know, from my first month there,….so many people were just openly gay and bisexual, I was like "Oh, my god, what is this all about?" I wasn't really out to myself then.

Jen described the atmosphere of her school and moved into memories of her initial reactions upon starting school there. Within Jen's first month at this school, she noticed that several students were open about their sexuality and was intrigued by it. This is understandable when it is put in context of the small town high school Jen had previously attended.

> In Small Town, nobody is openly gay. No one in the entire town is. And then, up here, a third of the school is. It's definitely completely different, but it was the high school that made me realize that I was lesbian. I first came out as bisexual and then I experimented a little bit and was like, "Oh, no I'm not. I'm gay." Okay.

Jen attributed her realization of her sexual identity to her interactions with others at school. She further discussed how it was a fluid exploration of sexuality such that she could come out as bisexual and later come out as lesbian. Another element was that she was in a space where she could experiment and find out what felt right for her. Part of this seemed to be related to the possibility of having an open dialogue about sexuality with other students, as well as the visibility of queer students in Jen's high school. The importance of visibility was that it meant that a 'secret' did not have to be kept from peers, staff, and administrators.

> Just, there were lots of people in my classes who were openly…and people always asked me too. You know, "Are you bi, Jen? Jen, are you into girls?" Just stuff like that. And I'd be like, "No, no. Not me. But I'm okay with it." And then I just started saying, "Yah, yah I am."

> I don't know what made it so easy to be queer except for the fact that there were other queer people there…..Who were out and everyone was cool with that, and everybody knew and it was kind of, it was just a big culture shock. I was like, "Wow. I feel really safe here."

Cliques existed at City High School 'A', however Jen described them as being atypical from what might be expected. Groups mixed with each other, thereby eliciting an image of peer groups that was more fluid than what might exist in other schools.

> It's just; it's really an accepting environment. The school as a whole. Well, you get cliques at City High School 'A', but not like at other schools. The cliques kind of mix around and they get along with each other. They're not warring. There's not a lot of big fights or anything going at City High School 'A'. It's just a really positive environment. I don't know if that's because of the arts and being able to express yourself, or what it is. But, it's definitely pretty open-minded there.

Jen acknowledged that the clique structure at her school was likely similar to more 'straight' schools and pointed out that both queer and straight students were members of the cliques.

> There were definite cliques among the queer people....Because there were lots of straight people in the cliques as well, it wasn't like we were exclusively gay groups....But, I don't think it was any different than the straight cliques really. Cuz there were gay people in all of the cliques I guess, but we didn't really separate ourselves as "Oh, we're not going to hang out with you cuz you like the opposite sex. You can't hang out with us." It's just kind of, there were definite, I don't know, we were segregated into groups but not exclusive groups or anything. So, that was kind of cool.

What stands out was that the segregation of groups was based more on points of interest than on sexuality. For instance, Jen mentioned cliques such as: activists, media production, theatre, cheerleaders, football players, and the bookish people. As well, the clique boundaries were mutable and variable in a way that could include more people who might also have been a member of a different clique.

Overall, teacher, staff, and administrative openness to discussing and working with sexual diversity issues was positive. The principal facilitated a safe space for queer students even though he did not discuss it with group audiences. Initially, there was some discrepancy in Jen's stories of how her principal discussed queer issues. Early in the interview, Jen related:

> The principal used to talk about it and he knew it was going on and he didn't say he was okay with it, but he didn't say that he wasn't okay with it. He was just kind of like, "I don't know what's going on. La la la."

Later in the interview, Jen provided more depth to her previous story involving her principal. In the first telling, Jen described the principal as willing to talk about it and was aware of the queer population of students in his school. In the second telling, the principal's awareness of queer issues in his school was presented more cautiously. It was further explained that the principal did not talk about it and that students knew not to bring it up with the principal.

> It just didn't happen. He didn't really mention it. He knew it was, he had to know it was going on cuz he knew us. He knew that we were queer. He didn't really talk about it, he didn't really ask about it. We

> kinda knew not to tell things about it. It wasn't a negative thing, it just was something we didn't talk about. I don't think that he was really anti-gay or anything. I mean, he created City High School 'A', and he knows what an open environment it is. I just don't think he was comfortable with it. Comfortable talking about it. But he seems…it wasn't a bad thing or anything. I never felt discriminated by him. So I think it was just a comfortability issue with him. And I know that there were rumours about him a few years back that he was gay, because he's a bachelor. Or maybe it was that he just didn't want to start rumours up or something. But, he just kind of backed off the issue.

When this discrepancy was brought to light, Jen clarified that the principal would "talk one-on-one," however he "didn't talk about it in groups or as a school thing." It appeared that the principal was open to discussing sexual diversity/queer issues on an individual level with students.

Jen stated that "most of the teachers were pretty cool." She further related that the school counsellors were generally "open-minded" and "never really commented on sexuality." One counsellor in particular was "fine with everything [students would] tell her." One negative incident involved some difficulties that Jen experienced when she put up posters to advertise for the upcoming Gay Pride Parade. It appeared that discrepancies existed in the length of time posters were allowed to stay up and also with the approval process for posting (e.g., some posters went through a formal approval process whereas others did not).

There was only ever one incident that I can think of where stuff happened. I was advertising last year for the Gay Pride Parade. I made up my own posters. I just put them up because people do that at our school. They make up cool posters…..and those had stayed up for months and months at a time. So, I was like, "Okay, I'll just put up my posters for a week, and that'll be cool." I put them up and within half an hour they were being taken down, by one of the assistant principals. I was like, "What are you doin'?" and he said "Well, these are kind of offensive, don't you think?" I was like, "What, why are they offensive?" and he said, "Well, you know…" I said "No, I don't." And he said, "Well, this image here (there were two men hugging on it)." I was like, "Oh, kay." He keeps giving me all these bullshit things as to why they can't be up. Then he pulls off the top of his head "Oh, you didn't get them passed by the office, so you can't have them up. There's no stamp on them." Even though all the other posters in the hallways don't have stamps. Mine need them. So I said, "Okay." He took them all down. I made up a new poster and it didn't have the image on it. It was a nice fluffy image and I took them to the office and he said, "No, you can't put these up." I was like, "Why not?" He said, "Well, we don't approve of them. It doesn't belong in our school."…. "Why?"….. "Well, I don't know." Then they pulled out another thing and were like, "Oh, I know what it is. They're not real posters. You have to get official posters."

Present in this part of the story was an example of Jen's coping strategies. She was assertive in finding out what the root of the problem was from the assistant principal's perspective—that the posters had not been formally approved by the office, and later, that they were not official posters. There was also a sense that Jen was frustrated with her posters being taken down, as well as with the reasoning provided by the assistant principal. As Jen described the assistant principal pulling reasons "off the top of his head," a feeling existed that there may be other underlying reasons coming from him. Jen's persistence and resilience in this matter was further shown in the next part of the story.

> So I had to go and scrape up official posters to put up in the school. It was all one teacher [the assistant principal] doing this. So I went and got official posters. I got them, I submitted them to the office, and he couldn't say no because he couldn't think of anything to say to it. So, he let me put them up for a day and then I had to take them down because the parade was over. It was a huge battle and it was just one teacher that said that.

Not only did Jen persevere in this matter, but several peers also got involved in addressing this barrier to advertising for the Pride Parade. This was one example of how the peer environment at Jen's high school was a strong impetus for the open-minded and positive space within the school, especially around diversity issues.

Peer Interactions

Overall, the atmosphere of Jen's high school was open-minded, accepting, welcoming, positive, and provided a place where students could express themselves. A

large part of this stemmed from the students, how they interacted with each other, and the acceptance of diversity within the school. In relation to the postering incident, other students in the school got involved in different ways to address the problem. Some students wrote letters to the principal expressing their anger and pointing out the discrepancy between which posters were approved to be posted and for how long. Another student made posters of a letter written to the assistant principal addressing the issue.

> There were people that were helping me out, too. Cuz my friends just thought it was outrageous that he wouldn't put them up. People wrote letters to the principal. Another girl, she made up posters and they said, "Heh, Mr. X," in great big letters, and it was a letter to [the assistant principal]. She puts them all over the school about how homophobic he was and how her posters had stayed up forever.

> So, everyone's kind of pissed off and we wrote letters and then they let us put them up for a day. We had to take them down after the parade, but, at least I got them up....The letters that people wrote were to the principal, and I don't know if he got involved or not. Nobody ever said anything, but, the assistant principal, Mr. X, he finally just said "Okay," stamped them and gave them back to me...But, it was pretty bad. We kinda just started passing them out as flyers....cuz we couldn't put them up.

This incident provided one example of how several students came together to address an issue that they saw as unjust and that could have been resolved in a way that respected their needs. The fact that several students became active in this process speaks to the freedom students had to express themselves. It also speaks to a sense of community within the school and connection between students that likely became more evident at times like these.

One peer in particular had an impact on Jen's exploration, and emerging awareness, of her sexual identity. Jen credited this girl with playing a large part in Jen's coming out process. This story came up at two different times in the interviews. The first time Jen told the story about being asked out for coffee by this girl, it was a quick synopsis of what happened at that time, as well as how things progressed from there in terms of her coming out process. The second time Jen shared this story, it provided more depth into her thought processes and reactions to spending time with this girl.

> .....this girl, she took me out for coffee and I didn't realize that it was 'going out for coffee'. It wasn't just two friends and, I kind of freaked out. Then a month later I came out to the world. It was like, "Yah, I'm gay!" I don't know, I think it definitely has a lot to do with where I was.

> There was one girl who was in my chamber music class. She's amazing. She was the girl who took me out for coffee that day. She told me as we were walking to the coffee shop, all about her love life and her

> past and stuff. I was like, "Oh my God, she's gay. Oh my God." I was sitting there the whole time and she'd mention things and I was kind of questioning at this point, but not really. I mentioned something about boys and I remember hitting myself. Well, not hitting myself, mentally slapping myself and that kind of made me go, "Heh, why did I just mentally slap myself? What's wrong with talking about boys?" That kind of made me go, "Heh, okay. I see." So that's when I first started coming out…..She had a lot to do with it, I think. I turned her down. I totally said, "No, I'm straight. What are you talking about?" But, it was that meeting that kind of opened up my eyes a little bit.

In the first telling of this story, Jen described herself as being jolted at the realization that it was not two friends going for coffee. When asked more about this reaction, Jen elaborated by explaining that she was "scared because she sort of knew me before I knew myself." The reactions of being shocked, scared, and perhaps anxious were also accompanied by Jen's self-questioning about what her reactions meant. Some might argue that these reactions were a working through of internalized homophobia, which could be part of it. However, if we look at Jen's coming out process as a whole, this story provided insight into Jen's initial awareness that she might not be straight. Having reactions of fear, astonishment, and asking herself what these feelings meant allowed Jen to see new possibilities in her sense of self.

Further exploration and experimentation took place at 'make-out parties,' likely facilitated by the open-minded and accepting environment of the high school. These parties provided Jen with her first experiences with girls. A developmental period of

exploration that was usually available to non-queer/questioning youth, sometimes including make-out parties, was open to Jen and her peers from school.

> In grade 10, everybody was bisexual. Everybody was bisexual, especially the girls. We'd have the parties--make-out parties and stuff. There wouldn't be guys there because there's not very many guys at City High School 'A' that are straight. So, it was like everyone's bisexual and we're all experimenting and some of us really were bisexual and some people were just curious and that was cool, too.
>
> Those parties that were happening were....those were bad. I can't believe we did that stuff. A few of those and that's when I had my first experiences with girls. I was like, "Yah, this is where it's at." This is what's going on, so....

Jen spoke of curiousity and experimentation which are normal parts of adolescence. It is fascinating that the girls who went to the make-out parties saw sexuality as being on a continuum. There was not a rigid expectation at these parties that everyone should be lesbian, should be bisexual, and so on. Through experimenting at the parties, some girls realized they were bisexual, some lesbian, and some were curious/straight, and each of these was okay. There was no preferred sexual identity that people should try to squeeze themselves into. When asked further about experimenting, Jen stated that:

> ....experimenting in adolescence is what's supposed to happen. If you put it off until you're 21, it throws your whole life off. It's something you've got to go through with [friends/peers].

The culmination of Jen's experiences of peer acceptance and openness occurred at her graduation. She was nominated by the graduating class to receive an award that recognized the most admired and respected student in grade 12.

> Well, the best part was graduation, for sure. I received an award at graduation that kind of summed up my entire high school. It was amazing. It was very cool.....It was called the City High School 'A' Award. We had two votings throughout the entire year and everybody, the entire graduating class votes for who they think is the most admired and respected of students, and so they vote and they pick the top ten out of the first vote and then you vote again. I actually won it and I'm like, "Wow, I can't win an award like this." My school is great. They didn't pick the most popular kid or anything, they picked someone who they thought really deserved it. That was pretty cool. Cuz I was an out lesbian in high school. And, I'm not exactly like the "miss popular," "miss thin and beautiful," and that was pretty cool. Yah, that was the best part of high school for me.

As a lesbian in her school, as well as her activism and participation in the school community, Jen was acknowledged with an ultimate sign of respect and acceptance. For Jen, her peers and school environment provided a space in which she could fully explore

all aspects of herself, part of which was her sexuality. More importantly, Jen was accepted throughout this process.

Coping/Resilience Strategies

Before going into examples of Jen's coping and resilience strategies to harassment and/or unjust practices, it is important to hear her definitions of terms such as ignorance versus homophobia and tolerance versus acceptance. This provides background knowledge from which we can better understand the ways in which Jen coped with people who were intolerant, ignorant, or homophobic. In talking about ignorance and homophobia, Jen stated:

> They can also be one, but they can be separate too, I think. I was pretty ignorant growing up. I just didn't know any gay people and I didn't really know much about it. When I came up here I was like, "Okay." I was learning a bit. As my sisters went out to university they started bringing queer people home, and that was cool. I wasn't homophobic,…it was just because I didn't understand it. Homophobia is more like "Yah, I know it's out there, but it's wrong. I don't want to have anything to do with it." You know…..I think that even if you are interacting with queer people and you're, you are trying to learn about them, it doesn't mean you're going to believe everything and it doesn't mean that you're going to let got of all your homophobia. I think that you can definitely separate them.

In relation to tolerance, acceptance, and respect, Jen provided the following description:

Mich: You were talking about the difference between respect and tolerance. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about what you think respect and tolerance is.

Jen: Moreso acceptance than tolerance I think. We should respect each other and in that respect there should be acceptance. I don't think that tolerance is really respect. Tolerance is saying, "Yah, I don't like what you do, but I'm not going to say anything about it." It should be more acceptance. I don't really know how to, how to say it. You should accept people for who they are and say whatever goes on is cool. Not, I don't like what you do but I'm not going to tell you that. Cuz that's what tolerance is, you know. Tolerance is saying, "Yah, you know I don't like it, but I'm not able to say that anymore."

Jen's descriptions of these terms illustrate the nuances between each of them. There are no clear-cut divisions between some of them (e.g., ignorance and homophobia). Others may have different formal meanings compared with colloquial interpretations, which is the case with "tolerance." Now that the meanings of key terms often associated with harassment, discrimination, and overt acts of homophobia have been provided, some of Jen's related experiences and resilience strategies can be further explored.

One of the ways that Jen copes with what she sees as barriers or unjust actions is to access support and resources. In the example previously discussed, in which permission to distribute posters throughout the school was delayed, Jen sought support from peers. This support from peers turned into a letter writing campaign and other

activities. Jen also consulted with a different assistant principal about what was happening in order to explore what other options might be available.

> Well, during that [poster incident] I was really upset so I went to see one of the other assistant principals to let her know what's going on. She, she's pretty cool. She admitted that she knew how many queer students there were at City High School 'A' and that it was okay with her and everything. She also expressed a little bit of interest in setting up a feedback group there, or something like University Group. I thought that was really cool that she was kinda getting into that. I don't know if it was just out of pity or sympathy or whatever, or if she really meant it. But, she seemed pretty serious about getting a group and she was asking about numbers and stuff which was really cool.

Meeting with the assistant principal provided some hope to Jen. The assistant principal provided an opportunity to see that some administrators were supportive of efforts to strengthen the queer community at school. This assistant principal also went further to discuss the possibility of starting up a group at the school. However, even though these ideas were exciting to Jen, she also sensed that these offers might not be genuine, and may indeed stem from feelings of pity or sympathy. Jen further explained that she got the sense that the assistant principal "was feeding me things to make me feel better and not necessarily that she was going to follow through with them." In fact, Jen recently heard that no such group was starting to form at the school, providing support for her belief that offers to start a group were not sincere.

Jen shared a story about how she and some of her classmates interacted with a student who might be classified as being homophobic and who used intolerant language. Coping with his comments involved talking with him about his perceptions of queer boys/men hitting on him. Another strategy involved Jen and her classmates disregarding, or choosing to ignore, this student because he did not present them with immediate threat (e.g., physical violence).

> There was one guy in my English class who was really homophobic. He really was. He didn't mind that he was surrounded by queer people or anything. He just didn't wanna be touched by them. He was like, "I don't care if you guys are gay, but if they hit on me then I can't handle that." We kinda had to assure him, you know, if you're straight, gay guys probably aren't going to hit on you or if you're this homophobic, they're probably going to back off because they don't want to get beat up or anything. There weren't many people like that, really. I don't think he was really a danger to anyone. He was just kinda all talk.

Jen acknowledged that demeaning and prejudiced speech can be as harmful, if not moreso, than physical harassment. In the example with her English classmate, Jen and her classmates based their coping strategies on their previous experiences with this student. As such, it might not have been worth their energy to try to convince this student to change his beliefs. Jen discussed how someone could become less ignorant about queer people and still maintain homophobic beliefs. The English classmate may have been one

such individual. There were other students at school that Jen saw as being more truly ignorant than homophobic.

> Well, there were a few conversations that you had with, it was mostly guys that I had conversations with and I would go, "How can you say that?" They'd just say things about queer people, but I don't know if it was homophobia so much as ignorance. Because they just didn't know. They didn't talk about it and they hadn't really been exposed to it much in their lives.

Jen's coping strategies have evolved over time. While attending junior high in Small Town, Jen witnessed harassment of peers who did not fit gender role expectations (e.g., a boy who was effeminate, had long hair, and so on). Looking back at this time in her life, Jen realized that she maintained her popularity, in part, by keeping quiet. Part of this was knowing not to talk about, or defend, queer students for fear of being targeted herself even though she was not yet out to herself.

> It's kind of ironic to look back and see my straight [school-mate] who was a really cool little kid get beat up because they thought he was gay. And I was really popular because I kept my mouth shut.

Staying silent was in stark contrast to resilience strategies used by Jen presently and in high school; strategies such as verbally addressing prejudiced comments, actively participating in the queer community, a sense of humour, and simply ending the conversation. When Jen was asked for more information about how she copes with people similar to her English classmate, she commented that she is:

> ...blunt enough to tell them they're wrong. Sometimes, I'll get so frustrated I'll just end the conversation. I'm stubborn and sometimes you can't change them in conversation but you can freak them out.

Jen continued her activism while attending college, part of which involved membership in the campus political/support group.

> I told [a friend] that I wanted to be a part of the group this year. She put me in touch with the president and now I'm [a member of] City College Group. They just needed somebody who knew the community.

Jen developed coping strategies and confidence in herself in high school and incorporated these qualities into her daily life. This is especially relevant when one considers the overall positive, exploratory experiences she had in high school that are usually not available to queer students. In the next few stories that Jen shared in relation to experiences she had with gay-bashing outside of school, it was clear that she maintained a sense of humour around these issues and was aware of her safety zone. A deep sense of comfort and strength in her identity was also evident, which meant that Jen did not take verbal harassment personally or in a damaging way.

> There's been a few experiences, I'm sure. I'm pretty open about it and I've met people on the bus and stuff, or I've just been talking to people and it kind of comes up in conversation. I remember one time I was, I think it was two or three guys that I was chatting with on the bus on the way home. It came up and they were like, "That's so cool. That's awesome! Blah, blah, blah." And I was like, "Yah, but what if

I was a guy, would you still be saying that?" cuz I like to provoke things and they're like, "No, that's fuckin' gross! That's wrong!" I was like, "Oh, I feel safe right now." Cuz they just think about it as a sexual thing. Straight guys don't often understand that lesbian means no boys. You know, "All right, two girls, I can get in on that." But, they can't.

There was one thing two weeks ago. I was walking arm in arm with this girl down the street and we passed by, do you know _____ High School?....Well, we were walking and there were about 10 kids standing out back playing hackey sack. As we walked by they were like, "Ew, lesbians!" And me opening my big mouth was like, "Yah, yah we are. So what?" They were kinda like, "Ew" and kept making gross noises towards us and stuff. I was like, "Ew, breeders" just to get back at them. That didn't go over so well. They're like, "You wanna go?" and they started to start stuff with us and we're like, "No, we have to go now." They were 14 or 15 probably. My stupid big mouth. I haven't had many experiences like that. But, it's a little scary.

Oh, last night. Last night I was kissing a girl, just kissing her good night at the bus stop. This car drove by and said, "Oh, fuckin' dykes!" I was like, "Yah, what do you care?" They think it's going to affect us calling

> us dykes. You know, we are dykes. Yah, it's pretty bad. I kinda like that though now, cuz you know what? I don't care if we get attention or not. It's like, it's just what happens, you know? They wouldn't say it, they might even still say stuff if we were straight and making out on the street corner, right? Like, "Get a room!" or something. It's just a little bit different cuz we're two girls. I don't care what people say anymore. If I was by myself and walking down the street I probably wouldn't be screaming, "I'm gay! I'm gay!" But, I was with a friend and we're pretty big girls, we can take it.

Within these stories of resilience and strength, Jen acknowledges that there were incidents when she later wondered if she should have said certain things or pushed the matter past a 'line.' Following events in which Jen challenged comments from a stranger (or strangers), personal risks were taken. Risks included physical consequences such as verbal threats to physically harm her and a friend, as well as mental and emotional consequences in that the overall atmosphere of safety diminished even though no overt actions had taken place. Jen's personal sense of strength and resilience is to be commended while acknowledging that in certain situations risks are taken and consequences/dangers (physical, mental, emotional) can be present.

Diversity and Safety in Schools

In addition to the coping and resilience strategies used by Jen and her peers, Jen provided some suggestions as to how a safer school environment for every student could be created and/or maintained. Education of students (both in the curriculum and fostering positive discussions about sexuality), addressing homophobic comments in class, as well

as teachers and students working together were suggestions provided by Jen based on her experiences in school.

Jen: I think it should be in the curriculum. For sure….not have a queer studies class or anything, but, when sex ed is being taught, teach about sexuality. And not just heterosexuality. When it is addressed, don't say it's bad or wrong or say, "Oh, we can't really say much about this."

Mich: So, to foster discussion around it, instead of shutting it down…

Jen: Mm hmmm. And positive discussion around it too.

By stating that sexuality needed to be in the curriculum, yet not having a separate class for queer studies, Jen was suggesting that discussions around sexuality need to be integrated into classes already offered. Her example was sex education. Jen shared a story about two different experiences she had in sex education classes, and how each teacher's reactions impacted her.

> Maybe there needs to be some kind of education set in place. In sex ed, it's taught in grade 6 for us and I asked a question about homosexuality in grade 6. I think I asked basically what it is and how it works and stuff. My teacher said, "We don't discuss that here. This isn't the place." I was like, "Oh, okay." So I didn't ask again until grade 9 and I asked, we were talking about safe sex. I was talking about, "Well, is there a higher risk between two women than there is between a man and a woman?" My teacher answered it and that was the first positive reaction I had ever gotten….For sure. It

needs to be addressed more by the faculty, for the students.

Again, Jen's persistent nature and willingness to speak up were present in this story. If she had not asked her second question, she would not have had the positive experience of a teacher who was willing to talk about lesbian or gay sex. Jen brought up the need for teachers to address issues of sexuality for students. She also discussed how teachers need to address verbal harassment, such as homophobic insults, as they occur in class, in hallways, and on school property in general.

> But, gay-bashing on it's own definitely needs to be addressed. When there's somebody who screams across at another guy, "Oh, you fuckin' faggot!" I think a teacher needs to say, "Get out of the classroom until you…" or whatever they would do about it. Because it happened a lot to [a student in Small Town] and the teachers there felt the same way as the students. So….they didn't really do anything about it. They kind of turned deaf ears. And that's not how it should be.

Jen highlighted an important point here that teachers who have similar beliefs to the students making homophobic comments have a professional duty to address these comments in class so that a safe learning environment is provided for every student. In talking about these issues, it seemed that Jen thought it was the responsibility of both teachers and students to create this safe place.

> Mich: So it sounds like your idea of a safe school is the students and also the teachers helping to create that place.

Jen: And, create spaces of respect I think. Not just tolerance, like respect and acceptance....So, I think the teachers need to help create a place where there's going to be respect. But, the students have to be taught it as well. You know....It has to be a two-way thing.

The idea of teachers and students working together to create a space of respect and acceptance made sense since it is these two groups that interact most frequently in the daily life of a school. Jen also provided a suggestion for counsellors to make their services more accessible by "mak[ing] it more well known that they're okay with it." It was also suggested that the spectrum of sexualities be "addressed more in health class."

In three individual meetings, that spanned over several months, Jen shared several stories of her experiences growing up in a small prairie town, how her expectations of high school were challenged when she moved to the city, the ways in which her school environment and peers facilitated her personal exploration and identity development, coping strategies that developed to face challenges, and suggestions for the creation of a safe place in school. With these rich, detailed stories and experiences to help us understand Jen's experiences, we can connect them with the literature and other students' experiences of high school. In addition, I will connect Jen's stories and our time together with the learning I have experienced throughout this process.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implications

Jen's experiences in high school were positive overall. Within the past five years stories from queer youth experiences that highlight support and respect have been occurring more frequently (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998; Blumenfeld, 1995; Fisher, 1999; Lipkin, 1999; Rivers, 1997). This is encouraging. At the same time, it needs to be noted that the majority of the literature integrated in this thesis is from the United States, which means that scenarios in Canadian schools might provide a different picture than what is portrayed in American research. Survey research indicated that attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex marriage are different in the United States than in Canada (Lipkin, 1999; McIlroy, 1999). Furthermore, there has been an increase in Canadian laws and legislation that support queer persons and citizens (Fisher, 1999). Similarly, initiatives within schools are fuelling policy changes. One such program is Safe and Caring Schools in Alberta, with a specific educational resource that focuses on the issues of lesbian and gay students (Alberta Teacher's Association, On-Line).

Even with more of a Canadian image of school environments, Jen's high school is probably unusual in regards to the visibility of, and dialogue between LGBTT-SQ students. More importantly, the high number of out students at Jen's high school (she mentioned that a third of students were queer) likely sets it apart from other schools. Another fascinating point is that the open-minded, diverse, and accepting environment in Jen's school was created without the presence of a formal group such as a Gay-Straight Alliance. Students themselves formed a community; sometimes loosely bound such as in

the mutable cliques/groups and sometimes rallying together to address a specific issue such as the postering incident.

A paradox emerged between the literature on institutional exclusion and Jen's experiences of silence, on a group level, from administrators. Friend (1993) describes institutional exclusion as one way to make a group of people invisible through silence. One of Jen's stories described the situations in which her principal would discuss queer issues. For instance, the principal conversed with students on an individual level about the LGBTT-SQ community and relationships. However, on a group level Jen's principal would not talk about it. The paradox lies in the fact that although there were situations of silence regarding queer issues, the queer community in the school still thrived and persisted. These students were not invisible. To put this in context, Jen described how the silence from the principal was not meant to keep queer students invisible (silence as repression). Most students were aware of this, according to Jen, because the principal's appreciation and compassion for them as persons was evident. Through this scenario, it was possible to see silence in a different way than how it has been discussed in the literature. It is also necessary to point to the complexities present for the principal to be responsible and responsive to queer students while keeping in mind potential responses from interest groups such as parents and school groups.

Silence can also be experienced in situations where homophobic verbal comments are not addressed by teachers or school staff who are within hearing range (Carter, 1997 as cited in McFarland & Dupuis, 2001; Friend, 1993). For Jen, being witness to teachers failing to address verbal harassment was more frequent in junior high than in high school. Having observed this lack of action on the part of adults, Jen suggested that teachers take

more responsibility; both in addressing harassment and helping to form a safe environment for all students. She further advocated for the collaboration of teachers and students in fostering, and learning/educating about, respect for the diversity that lies within all people, part of which is sexual identity.

The importance of peers in adolescence can be explored through the concept of peer policing (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Quinlivan, 1996). Peer policing is described as peers acting as 'enforcers' of roles and behaviour. Policing is usually based on social expectations and is enforced when expectations such as sex and gender roles are not met. In particular, Quinlivan further detailed that when students do not meet expectations, they are bullied or ostracized in an attempt to make them conform to the 'normal' expectations. When Jen was asked about her perceptions of peer policing and how it existed in her school, she stated that "it was almost the reverse" in her school. She elaborated by saying that peer policing consisted of students trying to open the minds of students who typically fit into the cheerleader and football cliques. Interestingly, peer policing at Jen's school was about encouraging students to explore life outside of the 'norm' as set out by society rather than fit everybody into it; and it was done in a non-coercive, non-bullying fashion. In essence, 'peer policing' can also be used in a positive, encouraging way. To avoid confusion and because 'policing' sounds so rigid and authoritarian, the more positive use of peer policing likely merits its own term.

In the identity development literature, experimentation and exploration are extremely important (Erikson, 1968, 1974; Mitchell, 1992; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). One area of experimentation that usually occurs in adolescence is related to interpersonal relationships (Mitchell). Some LGBTT-SQ youth need to pass as heterosexual, deny

same-sex feelings, and hide their sexual identity to maintain personal safety (DiPlacido, 1998; Quinlivan, 1996; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). In contrast, Jen and her school peers were able to freely and openly explore their sexuality while going through high school. Part of this involved the open dialogue between classmates about one's sexuality as well as going to make-out parties with and dating girls from school.

Contrary to a pervasive theme of family rejection in developmental literature relevant to queer adolescents (Ryan & Futterman, 1998), Jen experienced support from her family when she came out to them. Jen's experiences paralleled the stage model developed by Troiden (1989) but the time frame was condensed. For example, self-identifying and disclosing sexual identity to other queer people occurs in late adolescence of early adulthood according to Troiden. Jen came out to her peers and siblings in grade 10. The fourth stage of Troiden's model incorporates sexual identity into all aspects of one's life and coming out is normalized. Since this is the last stage, and based on the model's suggested time line, it is likely to begin in early adulthood or later. It appeared that Jen's level of self-acceptance was growing and strengthening in grade 10 and was likely incorporated into all aspects of her life soon after. Troiden was clear in stating that his model was not rigid in terms of the age guidelines set out for each stage. Similarly, he stated that LGBTT-SQ youth have been coming out at younger ages. With Jen fitting into both of these points (e.g., her process did not follow the age guidelines and she came out at a younger than average age) it begs the question of why Troiden specifies age guidelines at all. What seems to be most important is facilitating each person's identity development in a way that fits for them. This would mean supporting the process however it occurs, and at any age.

Identity, it's development, and coping are strongly linked. Hewitt (1989) related that people with identity, "know who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going" (p. 152). Similarly, Mitchell (1992) stated that the more optimistic adolescents are in picturing the future, the greater their ability to cope with adversity in the present. Likewise, if the future is filled with promise, or high expectation, the tension of daily living loses much of its power. It makes sense that if one is experiencing identity confusion, seeing the future with optimism or promise will be challenging. Jen's sense of identity has been incredibly strong since high school and this can be seen in the way she has coped with, and currently manages difficulties: direct conversation, questioning comments made by others, seeking support, accessing resources, having a sense of humour, persistence, resilience, and adaptability.

Hewitt indicated that identity formation "is to be a whole and complete person, and not fragmented into roles and ruled by scripts. It is to be connected with others and yet true to oneself" (p. 152). I believe Jen's strong sense of identity has had a great impact on the coping/resilience strategies she has developed. Part of Jen's identity appears to include a desire to challenge others' perceptions of, and beliefs about, 'queerness.' In some instances, this involves taking risks with potential physical, mental, and emotional consequences. I also believe that she has formed a self in which she is a whole person, is not ruled by scripts, and who can be connected to herself and to others while maintaining her true self.

<u>My Learning</u>

Straight privilege is something that I continue to learn about, explore, and see in different areas of my life. A significant area in which I witness this every day is how men

and women (including my partner and I) can walk down the street holding hands and give a hug/kiss goodbye without facing verbal harassment similar to what Jen has repeatedly experienced. In essence, my sexuality is one area of my life where I do not have to build a safety wall to protect my sense of self and integrity against heteronormative sticks and stones.

More importantly, with privilege comes power. This study in particular brought to light the personal effort involved in resolving how power would exist within the collaborative research relationship. I struggled with this unwanted, yet undeniable, power/privilege position. This was evident in the way I approached disclosing my sexual identity to Jen. In the first meeting, I neglected to discuss in depth my personal interests in the research with Jen, nor did I reveal my sexual orientation. While I reflected about the first interview, there was a gnawing sense that I left some important pieces out and I worried about how this would effect our future interactions.

In our second meeting, I brought this up and talked with Jen about her reactions to me leaving out my sexual identity. I acknowledged that my leaving out certain pockets of information might have left the relationship/interaction out of balance. Jen first stated that she already thought that I was straight and further related that it did not cause any awkwardness or rupture in the relationship. She felt that my interest in doing research in this area showed that I had some understanding of the issues and that I was motivated to work toward change. I appreciated Jen's honesty. I also recognized that her strong sense of self and security in her own identity likely played a part in how she processed our discussion. From our dialogue in this meeting, I learned that the situation may have been different if I had been working with someone who was not as secure in her identity. It

solidified the necessity for me to be open about my sexual identity in future research endeavours.

In the beginning of my research process, my learning and awareness of heteronormativity was growing and I began to question how I fit into the world as a straight person. An excerpt from my reflective journal provides some insight about this internal struggle:

> How I struggle with my straightness! What do I do when I have somewhat of a conception of the position I hold in a heteronormative world? Do I identify myself right off [in the company of LGBTT-SQ persons], or is that 'pulling rank' and establishing my power right off the bat? What does it mean if I am silent about being straight? Aren't I then neglecting to recognize (outwardly) my privileged position?
>
> Members of minority/oppressed groups often/always have to identify themselves, yet straight white people don't. By saying I'm straight right away in the company of queer persons, does it seem like I want to distance myself from a queer identity? Or does it seem like I'm saying, "I'm straight AND I would like to be a member of your group/community," while being aware that I could never completely be one because I have not had experiences of growing up queer in a heteronormative society?

> It's so confusing. I never realized how complex heterosexism is in our world—mostly because it pervades everything, absolutely everything in daily life.

Reading over this journal entry, I think to myself that I am in a different place than I was when I wrote this almost two years ago. Not only am I more comfortable in my straightness, I realize that in reflecting on my privileged position and seeing sexuality as existing on a continuum, I do not identify with being purely straight. I see myself as a 'mostly straight' woman who is also an ally of the queer community and an advocate for sexual diversity. In this way, I look forward to how I can incorporate this into my daily life.

In listening to Jen's experiences from high school, and having an overall image of an accepting/open environment, I feel hopeful about the changes that are occurring in schools. I learned that in some schools, the environment is facilitative of exploration, experimentation, and the freedom to express oneself. I learned that students are respected for these processes within such an environment. This is particularly hopeful because it is so unlike my own experiences in high school, in which I was harassed for visible differences and was not accepted or respected in my exploration of self. With this learning, I also recognize that further work needs to be done so that change can continue to happen in more schools.

While I was writing Chapter 4, I asked myself what value this research will have for school counsellors, psychologists, social workers, or therapists. I experienced feelings of doubt over the usefulness of this project because there is no clear transition from experiencing hardship/pain/suffering to healing/happiness/strength. On the other hand, I was passionate about the value of this research because of the learning that can occur

from listening to, and understanding, Jen's experiences. I later came to realize that a focus on suffering and hardship fits into a historical framework of psychology in which theories and techniques have been focused on identifying and fixing a problem. Focus has been on personal suffering, while personal strengths and abilities to heal have been neglected. By taking a strength-oriented approach to this research, the resiliency, coping, and humour present in Jen's stories could come through. Also, I believe that a strength focus acknowledged that Jen, and other adolescents, possess an incredible ability to deal with challenges if they are provided the space in which to do so.

Coming from a counsellor perspective, and because Jen had suggestions for school counsellors, it is necessary to discuss ways in which school counsellors, and counsellors/therapists in general, can place their learning from this research into their own context(s).

Implications for Counsellors

Although the focus of these implications will be for school counsellors since the focus of this study was on school environments and the experiences of a lesbian student, counsellors in various fields will likely find something useful to consider. In fact, implications from this study will be pertinent to counsellors involved with individual or group cross-cultural counselling. Counsellors are in a unique position in the schools to advocate for the rights of queer students (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998; Black & Underwood, 1998). As such, it is essential that counsellors examine their own feelings, attitudes, prejudices, and biases toward LGBTT-SQ persons/clients.

While it is important for counsellors to engage in self-reflection, McIntosh (1992) and Wilson (1994) discuss how counsellors often miss an important step in the process of

understanding another person's culture. Counsellors often neglect to examine their own culture and how this has impacted their biases and prejudices. As such, counsellors need to ask themselves, "In what ways have I been heterosexualized?" or "How have I come to learn that heterosexual equals 'normal'?" Without understanding one's own culture it is increasingly difficult to be sensitive and respectful of others'. Wilson states that the greatest value of counsellor self-reflection is "their understanding and interpretation of their own experiences, their own cultures, and their own biases that assist them in seeing others more clearly" (p. 223). Black and Underwood (1998) encourage counsellors who are insecure or continue to have biases following self-reflection to refer queer youths to a counsellor or resource where appropriate, respectful services are available.

Self-reflection on the part of counsellors is also promoted by the American Psychological Association's Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns Joint Task Force on Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (Division 44, 2000). Guidelines are provided that suggest or recommend specific professional behaviour, endeavours, or conduct for psychologists. These guidelines are divided into four sections: (a) attitudes toward homosexuality and bisexuality, (b) relationships and families, (c) issues of diversity, and (d) education. The guidelines encourage counsellors to recognize how their attitudes and knowledge about queer persons might impact assessment, therapy, consultation, and referral. These guidelines can assist counsellors develop and enhance their sensitivity to, and understanding of, diverse client needs.

An implication of particular importance to Jen was the accessibility and visibility of school counsellors' attitudes toward queer issues and persons. In general, counsellors

need to provide an environment in which the adolescent can explore his/her sexual feelings as an integral part to developing as a unique individual (Black & Underwood, 1998). I would argue that counsellors can also work to create a safe environment beyond their office door. Several authors provide excellent suggestions, at varying risk levels, for teachers/counsellors/administrators to facilitate a more inclusive environment.

In addition to engaging in self-reflection (Black & Underwood, 1998; Division 44, 2000; McIntosh, 1992; Wilson, 1994), school personnel are encouraged to:

- Inform themselves about LGBTT-SQ people, their community, and about heteronormativity/homophobia. For example, one can read books, journals, or periodicals.
- Attend LGBTT-SQ lectures, meetings, and have conversations with openly queer people.
- Engage straight people, including family and friends, in discussions about sexual identity/diversity and homophobia (Black & Underwood; ferren, 1997; Imich, Bayley, & Farley, 2001; Lipkin, 1999; Monahan, 1997; Omizo, Omizo, & Okamoto, 1998).

In terms of creating a safe and equitable classroom and/or office, one can:

- Use inclusive language that implicitly allows for LGBTT-SQ possibilities (e.g., parent, spouse, date).
- Challenge homophobic language and name-calling.
- Put up "positive space" or LGBTT-SQ friendly signs and symbols.
- Ask people what they would think if you were LGBTT-SQ if you are straight.
- Be clear about your willingness to support queer students.

- Invite LGBTT-SQ speakers to classes.
- If you are LGBTT-SQ, come out to students (Black & Underwood, 1998; ferren, 1997; Lipkin, 1999; Monahan, 1997).

Suggestions are also provided for creating a safe and equitable school. Counsellors and teachers can:

- Be role models of acceptance.
- Challenge name-calling and harassment.
- Call for the inclusion of LGBTT-SQ persons in diversity presentations.
- Work to form a gay/straight alliance and/or support group for queer students.
- Call for faculty/staff training in queer youth issues.
- Provide counselling services for queer youth and their parents.
- Invite queer speakers to the school.
- Develop a LGBTT-SQ awareness day.
- Work with parents and community-based support groups regarding the educational and health needs of queer youth.
- Encourage colleagues to use inclusive language and develop inclusive curricula.
- Come out to the school community (Black & Underwood, 1998; ferren, 1997; Lipkin, 1999; Monahan, 1997).

As discussed previously, students at an alternative high school in Colorado were trained to be leaders and facilitators of a sexual orientation workshop (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998). This provided an opportunity for counsellors and students to work together on diversity issues. At the same time, it allowed the students/peers to carry some of the

responsibility in creating a safe school environment. Based on Jen's experiences, peer support and acceptance of both diversity and the exploration of one's sexual identity proved to be critical in Jen's own development.

In terms of more specific approaches to intervention, Black and Underwood (1998) provide some helpful suggestions:

- To be yourself and to be sincere is most important.
- Using the terms that your client uses is also important. If students are uncomfortable with words such as lesbian, homosexuality, gay, and so on counsellors can use "same-sex feelings/attraction/relationships" instead.
- Confidentiality must be respected in light of the risks that can be involved in coming out to one's parents, family members, and friends.
- Validate each student's feelings, whether he/she is feeling alone, afraid, guilty, ashamed, angry or excited, proud, comfortable, whole, and strong.
- Offer to help and provide support in their process, wherever they might be.
- Provide accurate information in relation to community resources, books, magazines, health issues (including safe sex practices and sexually transmitted diseases), and support/youth groups.

Jen's experiences demonstrate that change is happening in schools and that counsellors/school staff, with students, can use this momentum to further develop safe spaces for all students.

Limitations

Because case study and narrative inquiry approaches to research focus on the holistic, in-depth experiences of people, generalizability is not possible. Results of this

research can only be understood and interpreted within the context of one lesbian student's experiences. These experiences cannot be assumed to be the same for all lesbian high school students. The beauty of case study research and narrative inquiry lies in the appreciation of unique qualities and details that create richness in people's lives.

In this research, I shared some of my own experiences and reactions throughout the process. Within a quantitative paradigm, this may be interpreted as researcher bias. I would suggest that the interwoven stories of Jen and myself have provided an opportunity for me to engage in a self-reflective journey; one in which I have a clearer understanding of who I am. This is essential for me as a counsellor, especially since I will continue to work with diverse clientele. While reviewing limitations of this research is essential, it is also important to look at how this research plays a role in future endeavours.

Implications for Further Research

It is clear that further investigative studies in the area of queer youth and school environments, particularly from a Canadian perspective, is needed. I would also argue that research involving lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit youth needs to be emphasized in response to the historical lack of attention to these persons and their experiences. Possible directions for future research include: further exploration of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit students and their high school experiences, including coping and resilience strategies; further examination of the teachers, school staff, school counsellors, and administrators who play an integral part in the school milieu (e.g., what role do they play, what have they observed/sensed in the school atmosphere, what is being done to create a safer space); and focused exploration of school counsellors, their attitudes/perceptions related to queer issues and students, and the level of support they

receive within their schools for projects/programs such as forming Gay-Straight Alliances, support groups, awareness days, staff/student training, and so on.

Concluding Comments

I feel truly honoured and privileged that Jen shared her life stories and experiences so generously with me. Our time together facilitated a personal learning journey that has allowed me to have a clearer view of who I am. More importantly, I believe, is that I have a clearer sense of what role I can play in furthering the change that is occurring in schools and society in general. I also hope that from this research counsellors, teachers, and therapists can relate experiences shared in this study (Jen's or my own) to their own actions, within their own contexts.

The most important lessons that I learned from this research are that self-reflection, as difficult as it can be, is powerful in creating personal change in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and level of motivation. Since I live in a position of straight privilege, I also recognize that I am a 'student' to these students. This means that I listen and gain a deeper understanding of queer person's experiences through their own voices, words, and actions. Also important is keeping my straight privilege in the forefront of my mind so that I am aware of the inherent inequalities that exist in our society.

In recognizing that queer persons, including youth, have been invisible in the past, it is essential that we continue to speak up and use our voices in relation to queer issues and rights. Silence only works to reinforce what has already gone before us and does not serve us well to further the change and progress that we are making.

In the end, we will remember not the words of
our enemies, but the silence of our friends.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. –

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APPENDIX A

Speak Up Research Project
INFORMED CONSENT

Principal Researcher: Michelle Tsutsumi
721-6163 or tsutsumi@ualberta.ca

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in the Speak Up Research Project.

- Much of the research on experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirited students has focused on the experiences of gay male youth. This study proposes to develop a more in-depth view of high school from the point of view of lesbian students.

- The main task is telling a personal life story. Several contacts are involved: initial contact, a personal interview with a possible second interview (1 hour each) and a review of the interview summaries.

- A possible risk is discomfort in discussing events from high school. Should discomfort occur, this will be discussed and referrals will be made as necessary.

- Participants may withdraw at any time by simply notifying the principal researcher, or Dr. Robin Everall (492-1163), of the wish to withdraw from further participation. Participants will be given continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate. New information will be provided to participants in a timely manner whenever this information is relevant in the decision to continue or withdraw from participation.

- Participants are free to ask any questions before, during, and after the interview, and may refuse to answer specific questions throughout the interview without having to withdraw completely from the study.

- Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by altering names and any unique information. The original interview data will be available only to the principal researcher and her supervisor/supervising committee and will be secured during the project.

- Anticipated uses of the interview data will include a master's thesis to be housed in the university library, and may also include journal articles, presentations, or workshops.

- In the case of concerns or complaints about the Speak Up Research Project, participants can contact Dr. Robin Everall at 492-1163.

I have read the description of, and discussed the Speak Up Research Project.
I understand that I will receive a copy of the informed consent form.
I give my informed consent to participate in the project.

_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about your high school…
   * feelings
   * thoughts
   * what is it like as a lesbian/queer youth in your school?

      a) If the interviewee mentions stress/tension/fear/dis-ease in relation to school, then ask the following: What have you found helpful in coping with these feelings/thoughts? Negative events?

2. Who is contributing to a feeling of safety within your school?
   Who contributes to an unsafe feeling within your school?

3. What do you think needs to be done to make your school a safer place for lesbian/queer youth?